"Jim Kwik knows how to get the maximum out of me as a human being."
— WILL SMITH

# LIMITLESS

## UPGRADE YOUR BRAIN, LEARN ANYTHING FASTER, AND UNLOCK YOUR EXCEPTIONAL LIFE



JIM KWIK

FOREWORD BY MARK HYMAN, M.D.

# *Praise for*
# LIMITLESS

"Jim Kwik knows how to get the maximum out of me as a human being."

— **WILL SMITH**

"While many authors claim to teach some amazing skill, no skill is as powerful as learning how to learn. It is the superpower from which all others grow. . . . I've seen with my own eyes what can be done with this book's triad of motivation, mindset, and method. Read on and apply what you learn. You just might amaze yourself."

— **ERIC SCHURENBERG,** CEO, Fast Company & Inc.

"My research on Alzheimer's underlines the importance of not only protecting your brain from injury but also of challenging yourself through continued learning. Jim Kwik has lectured, with great feedback, at the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health to our staff, caregivers, and patients; he is the expert on brain fitness and accelerated learning."

**—JEFFREY L. CUMMINGS, M.D., SC.D.,** Founding Director, Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health; Director, Center for Neurodegeneration and Translational Neuroscience; Professor and Vice Chair for Research, Department of Brain Health, University of Nevada–Las Vegas (UNLV)

"Where I empower women about money matters, Jim Kwik empowers people to take learning into their own hands. Our mind is our greatest wealth-building asset. When you read *Limitless*, you'll not only get smarter, you'll accomplish things you never thought possible."

— **NICOLE LAPIN**, TV news anchor, money expert, and #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *Rich Bitch*, *Boss Bitch* and *Becoming Super Woman*

"Warriors throughout time prepare and focus. They are unrelenting. Jim Kwik helps you to conquer your brain and hold your ground against the forces of distraction and negative thinking. His book *Limitless* is a must-read for an unstoppable mind."

— **GERARD BUTLER**, award-winning actor and producer

"While I was at GE, Jim Kwik coached our executive team and spoke at many of our company meetings with high reviews. He is a world-class expert at delivering the training and tools that high-impact teams need to elevate their organization."

— **BETH COMSTOCK**, former Chief Marketing Officer and Vice Chair at General Electric and best-selling author of *Imagine It Forward*

"I hang on every word out of Jim Kwik's mouth. . . . He has such a powerful ability to help people unlock abilities that they never even knew they had."

— **TOM BILYEU**, CEO of Impact Theory and co-founder of Quest Nutrition

"*Limitless* is the perfect companion to anyone who wishes to spark meaningful change. In this book, Jim will show you how to unleash your mind, your drive, and your life."

— **LISA NICHOLS**, speaker, CEO, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *No Matter What!*

"When achieving breakthroughs, we must face skepticism and the deeply held conventional thinking that's been drilled into so many of us. *Limitless* teaches you how to dispel the 7 lies of learning that are holding your true genius back. . . . Your brain won't be the same after this book!"

— **NICK ORTNER**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Tapping Solution* and *The Tapping Solution for Manifesting Your Greatest Self*

"In *Limitless*, Jim Kwik shares methods for unlocking your potential. He guides you, step by step, to become the person you want to be with his simple-to-start brain-enhancing and learning habits."

— **BJ FOGG**, PH.D., founder of the Behavior Design Lab at Stanford University and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Tiny Habits*

"Jim Kwik is like a personal trainer for your brain. He had coached my team on accelerated learning strategies to help them sharpen their focus, productivity, and mental performance. I've always believed you win in your mind first, then step onto the playing field, not the other way around. Read this book, there are no limits."

— **ALEX RODRIGUEZ**, 3-time MVP, 14-time All-Star, World Series Champion, and CEO of A-Rod Corp

"Transformation begins with preparing your mind for change. By the end of *Limitless*, you will believe in your untapped potential. New levels of success are possible and achievable with Jim Kwik as your guide."

— **JACK CANFIELD**, award-winning speaker, co-creator of the Chicken Soup for the Soul® series, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Success Principles*

"Memory is crucial to happiness, as Jim Kwik so beautifully explained during one of my most popular podcasts episodes ever. In his book *Limitless*, he''ll challenge you to do some crazy ish, but I swear you'll train your mind to conquer your days to live your best life. Best of all? You'll realize you are enough."

— **JEANNIE MAI**, Emmy & NAACP award-winning entertainer/producer, co-host of *The Real*

"In the same way that I help students and adults overcome their fears related to numbers and arithmetic, Jim Kwik helps people overcome their

limiting beliefs about learning. *Limitless* contains the practical and proven speed-reading, studying, and memory methods we can all count on!"

— **SCOTT FLANSBURG**, The Human Calculator®, Guinness World Record holder, founder of the National Counting Bee, and best-selling author of *Math Magic*

"If you think you can't read faster, remember more, or get unstuck, this book is for you. It will change your mindset, motivate you, and help you achieve what you never thought possible."

— **DAVE ASPREY**, CEO, founder of Bulletproof 360, Inc., and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Super Human*

"Sleep has a huge impact on brain health, and so does training your mind for memory, learning continuously, and defeating negative thoughts. *Limitless* gives you the toolkit for long-lasting cognitive health. The 10 recommendations Jim shares for generating limitless brain energy are worth the price of the book alone."

— **MICHAEL J. BREUS, PH.D.**, Clinical Psychologist, a Diplomate of the American Board of Sleep Medicine, a Fellow of The American Academy of Sleep Medicine, and best-selling author of *The Power of When*

"The goal of the USC Performance Science Institute is to help students, entrepreneurs, and organizations compete and excel through applied, science-based practices. Jim Kwik's workshop at USC was among our most valued and highest-rated. Jim's accelerated learning strategies are proven and powerful. *Limitless* is essential reading for anyone who wants to challenge the limits of mental performance."

— **DAVID BELASCO**, co-founder of the USC Performance Science Institute, Executive Director, Lloyd Greif Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, and Adjunct Professor, Entrepreneurship

"When it comes to learning faster and keeping your mental game strong, Jim Kwik is the guy. Get *Limitless* for a better brain. Save the brain!"

— **STEVE AOKI**, two-time Grammy-nominated artist, musician, DJ, music producer, entrepreneur, founder of the Aoki Foundation for brain science and research and author of *Blue*

"Our organization empowers people to change the world. Engaging 4.5 million change-makers requires focus, discipline, and fast thinking. Jim Kwik's three-pronged Limitless model has helped our team upgrade their minds to better solve challenging problems and create greater social impact."

— **MARC KIELBURGER**, co-founder of the We Movement, humanitarian and activist for children's rights, columnist, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Me to We*

"Exponential change requires a mental toolkit that amplifies creativity, rapid learning, global thinking, and optimism. *Limitless* is essential reading for anyone looking to expand the potential of their mind and advance beyond what is believed possible."

— **PETER H. DIAMANDIS**, Chairman and founder of XPRIZE Foundation, co-founder and Chairman of the Singularity University, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Abundance*

"Taking care of our brains is an integral part of health and well-being. *Limitless* gives you the power to train and optimize your mind so you can realize your full potential."

— **MAIA AND ALEX SHIBUTANI**, two-time Olympic medalist figure skaters, three-time world medalists, two-time U.S. champions, and authors of the Kudo Kids series

"Jim Kwik's methods for learning, memory, and thinking are so empowering. . . . Producing a record amount of content, globally, requires incredible attention to detail. Thanks to Jim's teachings, our hosts are thinking better, recalling more, and prioritizing brain health for our success as well as their own. This book is a must-read!"

— **MARIA MENOUNOS**, host of the *Better Together with Maria* podcast, CEO of @afterbuzztv, Emmy Award–winning journalist and *New York Times* best-selling author of *The EveryGirl's Guide to Diet and Fitness*

"As somebody who puts lots of emphasis on exercising the brain and not just the body, I found Jim Kwik's work very empowering. *Limitless* will take you to incredible places you never expected."

— **NOVAK DJOKOVIC**, professional tennis player, winner of 17 Grand Slam singles titles

"My research on Alzheimer's disease has taught me that we must continually strive to invent new ways to use our brains . . . . Jim Kwik's *Limitless* is a revelation in learning how to learn. You'll discover new possibilities to challenge your mind and live your best life."

— **RUDOLPH E. TANZI, PH.D.**, Professor of Neurology at Harvard University, director of Genetics and Aging Research Unit at Massachusetts General Hospital, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Super Brain*

"Achieving your goals in life is as much a mental game as it is physical. Do you want to grow your skills and improve your focus? *Limitless* is your book. Jim Kwik is your coach."

— **APOLO ANTON OHNO**, eight-time Olympic medalist, speaker, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Zero Regrets*

"As a young girl, I dreamed of traveling to space. Dreaming big is something I'm passionate about teaching others, especially today's youth. Jim shares that same vision that nothing can hold you back once you realize your limitless potential. *Limitless* will not only make you smarter, but help you dream bigger."

— **ANOUSHEH ANSARI**, CEO of XPRIZE Foundation, first female private space explorer, and first space ambassador

“Jim Kwik is the world’s elite trainer when it comes to your brain. In *Limitless*, he lights a path toward a transformation that strengthens your mental game, makes you think faster, and leaves you smarter than when you started.”

— **TRACY ANDERSON, CEO**, fitness pioneer, and author of *Tracy Anderson’s 30-Day Method*

“When my son suffered a life-threatening traumatic brain injury, I learned that mindset is everything. In *Limitless*, Jim Kwik shares the mindset and methods that are essential to thriving in a world of change. Even when the odds seem stacked against you, this book will show you anything is possible.”

— **JJ VIRGIN**, celebrity nutrition and fitness expert and *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Virgin Diet*

“When you connect to your true self, something magical happens. I help people express themselves through movement and dance. Jim Kwik’s *Limitless* taps into that same reservoir of belief that anything is possible.”

— **JULIANNE HOUGH**, Emmy award-winning dancer, actress, singer, and creator of KINRGY

“In competition and in life, the finest performers stay patient, consistent, and relentless. Jim Kwik’s *Limitless* will help you reach a whole new mindset—one that helps you achieve your dreams.”

— **DEREK HOUGH**, two-time Emmy award winner, six-time Dancing with the Stars champion, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Taking the Lead*

“Jim Kwik is an expert in achieving mental stamina and clarity of focus. *Limitless* will give you sustainable results in whatever you pursue.”

— **MIKE BRYAN**, professional tennis player, all-time doubles team record holder

“We know full well the importance of food as fuel for a healthy brain. What you do to sharpen your cognitive abilities matters too. In *Limitless*, Jim Kwik teaches you the mindset and metalearning strategies that help you reach genius levels.”

— **MAX LUGAVERE**, host of the Genius Life podcast and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Genius Foods*

“I’ve worked with on-screen superheroes throughout my career, and Jim’s ability to level up your learning and life is one of the world’s great superpowers. . . . *Limitless* is for any person or organization looking to unlock exceptional mental productivity and performance.”

— **JIM GIANOPULOS**, Chairman and CEO of Paramount Pictures

“There’s a whole science behind brain fitness, memory enhancement, and mental acuity, and Jim Kwik is the ultimate guide. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to maximize their cognitive potential and learning abilities.”

— **LISA MOSCONI, PH.D.**, director of the Women’s Brain Initiative and associate director of the Alzheimer’s Prevention Clinic at Weill Cornell Medical College, associate professor of neuroscience in neurology and radiology, and author of *The XX Brain*

“There’s no genius pill, but Jim gives you the process for unlocking your best brain and brightest future.”

— From the foreword by **MARK HYMAN, M.D.**, Head of Strategy and Innovation for the Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine and 12-time *New York Times* best-selling author

“Jim Kwik is just amazing. In my book *Use Your Brain to Change Your Age*, I wrote a whole chapter about him because one of the strategies to reverse brain aging and prevent Alzheimer’s disease is to work on your brain. And there is no one that I trust more than Jim Kwik and his programs to optimize brain functioning.”

— **DR. DANIEL AMEN**, physician, double board-certified psychiatrist, and 10-time *New York Times* best-selling author

"I'm keenly aware of how important it is to keep your mind and memory sharp. Jim Kwik's tools and techniques in *Limitless* are your brain's best friends."

— **MARIA SHRIVER**, Emmy award–winning journalist, founder of the Women's Alzheimer's Movement, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *I've Been Thinking*

"As a person who has quested for knowledge his entire life, I fully embrace what Jim Kwik has to teach in *Limitless*. When you learn how to learn, anything is possible, and Jim is the best in the world at showing you how."

— **QUINCY JONES**, music producer, recipient of Grammy Living Legend Award, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Q*

"I want to thank my friend Jim Kwik for all his support of the Stan Lee Foundation's commitment to literacy and education. I believe there is a superhero in each of us, and at Kwik Learning you will discover how to unleash your superhero powers."

— **STAN LEE**, Marvel Chairman Emeritus

"Jim Kwik is by far the world's best Memory Trainer. Our program with Jim on Mindvalley became the number one program of the year, and in a study of almost 1,000 students, the average increase in reading speed was an astonishing 170% in just 7 days of 10-minute-a-day lessons."

— **VISHEN LAKHIANI**, founder and CEO of Mindvalley and *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Code of the Extraordinary Mind*

"Jim Kwik has the ability to expand your mind and shine a light on your inner genius. Like my song 'Unwritten' says—your life is your story. *Limitless* will help you write yours with new possibilities."

— **NATASHA BEDINGFIELD**, Grammy Award–nominated singer and songwriter

# LIMITLESS

## UPGRADE YOUR BRAIN, LEARN ANYTHING FASTER, AND UNLOCK YOUR EXCEPTIONAL LIFE



JIM KWIK

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*For my readers and students*
*and the limitless heroes inside you.*
*Thank you for your time and trust.*
*This one's for you.*



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# FOREWORD

Our most precious gift is our brain.

It is what allows us to learn, love, think, create, and even to experience joy. It is the gateway to our emotions, to our capacity for deeply experiencing life, to our ability to have lasting intimacy. It allows us to innovate, grow, and accomplish.

Yet few of us realize that, by applying a handful of practical methods, we can enhance our brain and supercharge our ability to learn. Most of us know that we can improve our cardiovascular health through exercise and diet, but most of us do not realize that we can also greatly improve our brains, and in doing so, our life.

Unfortunately, our world doesn't foster a healthy environment for our brain. Before Jim Kwik provides a road map to become limitless, he indicts the four growing villains that are challenging our capacity to think, focus, learn, grow, and be fully human.

The first is *digital deluge*—the unending flood of information in a world of finite time and unfair expectations that leads to overwhelm, anxiety, and sleeplessness. Drowning in data and rapid change, we long for strategies and tools to regain some semblance of productivity, performance, and peace of mind.

The second villain is *digital distraction.* The fleeting ping of digital dopamine pleasure replaces our ability to sustain the attention necessary for deep relationship, deep learning, or deep work. I recently sat next to a friend at a lecture and noticed her picking up her phone multiple times within a few minutes. I asked for her phone and pulled up the screen time app. She had picked up her phone more than one thousand times and had one thousand notifications in one day. Texts, social media notifications, e-mails, and news alerts, while important in context, can derail our

concentration and train us to be distracted from what matters most in the moment.

The next villain is *digital dementia.* Memory is a muscle that we have allowed to atrophy. While there are benefits to having a supercomputer in your pocket, think of it like an electric bicycle. It's fun and easy but doesn't get you in shape. Research on dementia proves that the greater our capacity to learn—the more mental "brainercise" we perform—the lower our risk of dementia. In many cases, we have outsourced our memory to our detriment.

The last brain-damaging villain is *digital deduction.* In a world where information is abundantly accessible, we've perhaps gone too far in how we use that information, even getting to the point where we are letting technology do much of our critical thinking and reasoning for us. Online, there are so many conclusions being drawn by others that we have begun to surrender our own ability to draw conclusions. We would never let another person do our thinking for us, but we've gotten far too comfortable with letting devices have that very power.

The cumulative effects of these four digital villains robs us of our focus, attention, learning, and, most importantly, our ability to truly think. It robs us of our mental clarity and results in brain fatigue, distraction, inability to easily learn, and unhappiness. While the technological advances of our time have the potential to both help and harm, the way we use them in our society can lead to an epidemic of overload, memory loss, distraction, and dependency. And it's only going to get worse.

The message of this book couldn't be more timely. You were born with the ultimate technology, and there is nothing more important than the health and fitness of our brain—it controls everything in life. Learning how to filter all the data, to develop new methods and skills for thriving in a distracted world drowning in a flood of information, is what is needed to thrive in the 21st century. Learning and the ability to learn faster and more easily makes everything else in life possible, which means that it's never been a better time to train your brain the way you do your body. Just like you want a healthy body, you want a flexible, strong, energized, and fit brain. That's what Jim does for a living—he is the personal trainer for the mind.

The four supervillains are just an example of the limits you'll learn how to overcome in this book. The key to living an exceptional life, as Jim states, is a process of unlimiting ourselves. And he has cracked the code for

personal transformation with his Limitless Model. If you are struggling to reach a goal in any area, you must first ask: Where is the limit? Most likely, you're experiencing a limit in your mindset, motivation, or methods—which means that it's not a personal shortcoming or failure pointing to any perceived lack of ability. And contrary to what we tend to believe, our barriers are not set. We're in full control and can overcome them at any time.

If our mindset is not aligned with our desires or goals, we will never achieve them. It's critical to identify your limiting beliefs, stories, and deeply held beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about yourself and what's possible. Examining, excavating, and expunging those beliefs is the first step to having a limitless mindset. I was told I could do anything by my mother, that I was smart, capable, and could be the best at anything I tried. That deeply held belief allowed me to succeed beyond my wildest dreams. But I also had the belief that relationships were hard and filled with pain and drama from witnessing my parents' divorce and marriages. It took me nearly 50 years to erase that belief and find real happiness in my marriage.

The second secret to a limitless life is your motivation. Jim outlines three key elements to motivation. First, your purpose. The reason why matters. I want to age well and am committed to lifting weights and getting stronger even though it is not my favorite thing to do. The purpose supersedes the discomfort.

The second key is the ability to do what you want. This requires energy, and energy requires something called energy management. The science of human performance is critical to achieving your purpose—eating whole unprocessed food, exercise, stress management, quality sleep, and skills at communication and building healthy relationships (and eliminating toxic ones). And lastly the tasks must be bite-size, small steps that lead to success. Floss one tooth, read one page of a book, do one push-up, meditate for one minute, all of which will lead to confidence, and ultimately bigger successes.

The last key to being limitless is using the right method. We have been taught 19th- and 20th-century tools for functioning in the 21st century. *Limitless* teaches us the five key methods to achieve whatever we want: Focus, Study, Memory Enhancement, Speed Reading, and Critical Thinking. Using these upgraded learning technologies allows us to harness our mindset and motivation to more easily and effectively reach our dreams.

Jim is no stranger to limits. After a head injury as a child impaired his focus, concentration, and ability to learn, an insensitive teacher pointed to him and said, “There’s the boy with a broken brain.” Jim has spent his life learning how to overcome and heal from this injury and turn his challenges into a superpower of learning. We all suffer to some degree or another from broken brains. *Limitless* is the prescription for healing our brains, reframing limiting beliefs, and upgrading our life. Learning how to learn is the ultimate superpower, the one that makes every other skill and ability possible, and teaching this to you is this book’s goal.

In *Limitless,* Jim Kwik provides a road map for doing exactly this. Most of us are not raised with the tools we need, but Jim is generously sharing everything he’s learned in this book. Jim has spent three decades working in the trenches with people from all walks of life—students, teachers, celebrities, construction workers, politicians, entrepreneurs, scientists. He has worked with some of the most advanced educational systems around the world, training educators, superintendents, and students in his methods. His teachings truly work and can benefit us all.

There is no pill for genius, but there is a process to get there, and you’ll find it within these pages. *Limitless* is a blueprint for upgrading your brain, for not only learning how to learn faster, better, and more effectively, but also for healing your physical brain through nutrition, supplements, exercise, meditation, sleep, and more to increase the creation of new brain cells and the connections between them.

Jim delivers three books in one. If your current mindset, motivation, and methods are limiting your ability to achieve your dreams, then *Limitless* is the owner’s manual to a better, brighter, brilliant brain and future. Your learning and life will never be the same.

—MARK HYMAN, M.D.

Head of Strategy and Innovation
Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine
Author of 12 *New York Times* best-selling books
December 2019

"You know when you're a child and your imagination is limitless and you really believe in magic? I thought I had super powers."



—MICHELLE PHAN

# INTRODUCTION

What is your one wish? Seriously, if a genie offered to grant you one wish, but only one, what would you ask for?

Limitless wishes, of course!

Now, imagine that I'm your learning genie and I can grant you one learning wish—any one subject or skill. What one thing would you want to learn? What subject or skill would be the equivalent of asking for infinite wishes?

To learn how to learn, right?

If you really knew how to learn smarter, faster, and better, then you could apply that to everything. You could learn to master your mindset or your motivation, or use the methods to pick up Mandarin, marketing, music, martial arts, mathematics—there would be no limit! You'd be a mental superhero! Anything would be possible, because you would be limitless!

My mission with this book is to grant you this wish in the pages that follow. Let's start by saying how much I respect and admire you. By investing in this book and now reading it, you are far ahead of most of the population who simply accept their present conditions and constraints. You are part of a small group of individuals who not only want more for their lives but also are willing to do what it takes to get results. In other words, you are the hero of this story; you've answered the call to adventure. I believe the ultimate adventure we are all on is to reveal and realize our fullest potential and inspire others to do the same.

I have no way of knowing how your life's journey has taken you to this book. I'm guessing that at least part of that journey is accepting the confines put upon you, either by others or by yourself: You can't read fast enough to keep up with everything you need to know. Your mind is not agile enough to succeed at work. You're not motivated to get things done or you lack the energy to reach your goals. And so on.

The nature of this of the book is transcending—ending the trance: the mass hypnosis and lies that we learned from our parents, programing, media, or marketing, that suggests we are limited. That, somehow, we are not enough, not capable of being, doing, having, creating, or contributing.

Belief that you are limited might be holding you back from your biggest dreams as well—at least up until now. But I promise you that none of your beliefs truly constrain who you are. We all have vast potential inside of us, untapped levels of strength, intelligence, and focus, and the key to activating these superpowers is unlimiting yourself. For more than 25 years, I've worked with people of all ages, nationalities, races, socioeconomic statuses, and education levels. What I've discovered is that no matter where you come from, no matter what challenges you face, you have incredible potential that's just waiting to be tapped. Every person—regardless of age, background, education, gender, or personal history—can advance beyond what they believe they deserve and is possible. And that includes you. Working together, you'll come to think of your own limitations as an outmoded concept.

Now in this book, I refer to superheroes and superpowers. Why is that? First, I am a bit of a geek that way. Because of my childhood brain injury and learning challenges, I escaped into comic books and movies to inspire me during my struggles. I realized that my favorite ones all shared the same pattern—the Hero's Journey. Joseph Campbell's classic plot structure appears in nearly all famed adventures, including *The Wizard of Oz; Star Wars; Harry Potter; Eat, Pray, Love; The Hunger Games; Rocky; The Lord of the Rings; Alice in Wonderland; The Matrix*, and more.

Think of your favorite story or one of the films or books I just mentioned. Does this sound familiar? The hero (for example, Harry Potter) starts out in the ordinary world, the world they've always known. The hero then hears the call to adventure. They have a choice—to ignore and stay in the ordinary world, where nothing will change, or heed the call and enter the new world of the unknown. If they heed the call (as Neo did with the red pill in *The Matrix*), they meet their guide or mentor (such as Mr. Miyagi in *The Karate Kid*), who trains and prepares them to overcome obstacles and realize new levels of fulfillment. The hero is introduced to new powers and skills, and encouraged to utilize their current abilities like never before. They transcend perceived limitations, learn a new way of being, and eventually face their trials. When they return back to the ordinary world

(like Dorothy going back to Kansas), they take with them the ultimate boon—the treasure, emotions, strength, clarity, and wisdom they discovered from their adventure. They then share their lessons and gifts with others.

The Hero's Journey is the perfect structure to lend power and purpose to your personal story. In *Limitless*, you are the superhero.

One of my core beliefs is that human potential is one of the only infinite resources we have in the world. Most everything else is finite, but the human mind is the ultimate superpower—there is no limit to our creativity, imagination, determination, or ability to think, reason, or learn. Yet this resource is also among the least tapped. All of us can be the heroes of our own story, dipping into the well of our potential every single day and never having that well run dry. But so few of us approach our lives this way. That's why I wrote this book—to help you realize that no matter where you are, or where you've been, you absolutely can free yourself and go from limits to liberation. That might be the only "extra" you need to transition from the ordinary world to the *extra*ordinary world.

This book is going to provide you with that extra. What you'll get within these pages is a series of tools that will help you cast off your perceived restrictions. You're going to learn how to unlimit your brain. You're going to learn how to unlimit your drive. You're going to learn how to unlimit your memory, your focus, and your habits. If I am your mentor in your hero's journey, then this book is your map to master your mind, motivation, and methods to learn how to learn. And once you've done that, you will be limitless.

Here's the door; you know what's waiting on the other side. Walk through it.



"If an egg is broken
by an outside force,
life ends.
If broken by an inside
force, life begins.
Great things
always begin
from the inside."



—JIM KWIK

# PART I

# FREE YOUR MIND



"We do not need
magic to transform
our world.
We carry all of
the power we need
inside ourselves
already."



—J. K. ROWLING

# 1

# BECOMING LIMITLESS

"I'm so stupid."

"I don't understand."

"I'm too dumb to learn."

These were my mantras growing up. There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't tell myself that I was slow, dumb, and that I would never learn to read, much less amount to anything later in life. If a pill existed that could supercharge my brain and make me smarter in one swallow (as there was in the 2011 movie *Limitless*, starring Bradley Cooper), I would have given anything to take it.

I wasn't the only one who felt the way I did about myself. If you'd asked my teachers when I was a kid, many would have said that I was the last person they'd expect to be writing this book for you. Back then, they would have been surprised to know that I was *reading* a book, let alone writing one.

This all stems from an incident in kindergarten that completely altered the course of my life. I was in class one day, and there were sirens outside the window. Everyone in the classroom took notice, and the teacher looked out and said she saw fire trucks. The entire class responded to this information the way kindergarteners do: We immediately rushed to the windows. I was particularly excited because, by that point, I was already obsessed with superheroes (I still am). To me, firefighters were the closest thing to real-life superheroes I knew. I bolted to the window with everyone else.

The only problem was that I wasn't tall enough to be able to look down at the fire trucks. One kid went to grab his chair to stand on, and that

inspired the rest of us to do the same. I ran back to my desk to get mine, pushing it right up against the huge iron radiator that ran along the bottom of the windows. I got up on my chair, saw the firefighters, and completely lit up. This was so exciting! My eyes stared and mouth gasped as I watched these courageous heroes in action with their seemingly impenetrable uniforms and their bright red vehicle.

But then one of the other kids grabbed my chair from beneath me, which caused me to lose balance and go flying head-first into the radiator. I hit the metal heater extremely hard and I started losing blood. The school rushed me to the hospital, where doctors tended to my wounds. But they were candid with my mother afterward; the injury to my brain was not mild.

My mother said I was never quite the same after that. Where I had been an energized, confident, and curious child before, now I was noticeably shut down and had a new difficulty learning; I found it extremely hard to focus, I couldn't concentrate, and my memory was awful. As you can imagine, school became an ordeal for me. Teachers would repeat themselves until I learned to pretend to understand. And while all the other kids were learning to read, I couldn't make any sense out of the letters. Do you remember getting in those reading circles, passing around the book, and having to read out loud? For me, that was the worst—nervously waiting as the book crept closer and closer, only to look at the page and not understand one word (I think that's where my crippling fear of public speaking initially came from). It would take me another three years to be able to read, and it continued to be a struggle and an uphill battle for a long time after that.

I'm not sure I ever would have learned to read if it weren't for the heroes I met and saw in comic books. Regular books couldn't hold my attention at all, but my fascination with comics drove me to keep pushing myself until I could read their stories without waiting for someone else to read them to me. I would read them by flashlight under my covers late at night. Those stories gave me hope that one person could overcome impossible odds.

My favorite superheroes growing up were the X-Men, not because they were the strongest, but because they were misunderstood and weirdly different. I felt I could relate to them. They were mutants, they didn't fit into society, and people who didn't understand them shunned them. That was me, minus the superpowers. The X-Men were outcasts, and so was I. I belonged in their world.

I grew up in Westchester County, a suburb of New York City, and I was super-excited one night to discover that, according to the comic books, Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters was located near me. When I was nine years old, I would get on my bike nearly every weekend to ride around my neighborhood looking for the school. I was obsessed. I thought, if only I could locate it, I would find in that school a place where I finally fit in, a place where it was safe to be different, a place where I could discover and develop my own superpowers.



## THE BOY WITH THE BROKEN BRAIN

In the real world, life was not very kind. It was around this time that my grandmother, who lived with us and helped raise me, started showing advanced signs of dementia. Watching someone you love lose their mind and memory is hard to describe. It was like losing her over and over until she passed. She was my world and, combined with my learning challenges, she is why I am so passionate about brain health and fitness.

Back in school, I was bullied and made fun of, and not just on the playground but in the classroom, too. I remember one day in elementary school a teacher, frustrated because I wasn't getting the lesson, pointed at me and said, "That's the boy with the broken brain." I was just crushed to realize that this was how she saw me—and that others probably saw me the same way.



Often when you put a label on someone or something, you create a limit—the label becomes the limitation. Adults have to be very careful with their external words because these quickly become a child's internal words. That's what happened with me in that moment. Whenever I struggled to learn, did badly on a quiz, wasn't picked for a team in gym class, or fell behind my other classmates, I would tell myself it was because my brain was broken. How could I possibly expect to do as well as others did? I was damaged. My mind didn't work like everyone else's. Even when I studied much harder than my schoolmates, my grades never reflected the effort I was putting in.

I was too stubborn to give up and managed to move on from grade to grade, but I was hardly thriving. While I was advanced in math because of

the help of a few of my academically talented friends, I was horrible at most of the other subjects, especially classes such as English, reading, foreign languages, and music. Then, in my freshman year of high school, things got to the point where I was at risk of failing English. My parents were called in by my teacher to discuss what I could do to muster a passing grade.

She offered an extra-credit project for me. I was to write a report comparing the lives and accomplishments of two geniuses: Leonardo da Vinci and Albert Einstein. She told me that if I did a good job on this report, she would be able to give me enough points to make sure I passed the class.

I considered this to be a huge opportunity, a chance to hit the reset button on what had been a difficult start to my high school career. I committed everything I had to writing the best report I possibly could. I spent hours and hours and hours at the library after school, trying to learn everything I could learn about these two brilliant minds while working on this paper. Interestingly, during that research I came across multiple mentions that Albert Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci each struggled with alleged learning difficulties.

After weeks of effort, I typed up the final report. I was so proud of what I'd done that I had the pages professionally bound. This report was a statement for me; it was the way I was going to announce to the world what I was capable of doing.

The day the report was due, I put it in my backpack, excited about handing it to my teacher and even more excited about the response I anticipated she would have to what I'd done. I planned to give it to her at the end of class, so I sat through whatever we were doing that day, trying to concentrate but constantly finding my thoughts flitting back to the look I expected to see on my teacher's face when I presented her with the report.

But then she threw me a curveball I was not prepared to hit. About halfway through the class period, the teacher ended her lesson and told the students that she had a surprise for them. She said that I had been working on an extra-credit report and that she would like me to present it to the class —now.

I had spent most of my school life trying to shrink so small that I wouldn't be called on in class; when you are the broken one, you don't feel like you have much to offer. I was beyond shy, and I didn't like to draw attention to myself. My superpower back then was being invisible. I was also deathly afraid of speaking in public. I'm not exaggerating here. If you

hooked me up to a heart monitor at that moment, I might have broken the machine. On top of this, I could barely breathe. There was simply no way I was going to be able to stand in front of everyone and talk to them about the work I'd done. So, I took the only option I saw available to me.

"I'm sorry; I didn't do it," I stuttered, just barely getting the words out of my mouth.

The expression of disappointment on my teacher's face—so different from the expression I'd fantasized earlier—was so profound that my heart nearly broke. But I just couldn't do what she wanted me to do. When class was over, after everyone had left, I threw my report in the garbage, and along with it a big part of my self-respect and worth.

## YOU ARE CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Somehow, in spite of all the troubles I had in school, I managed to get into a local university. I thought being a freshman in college meant a last opportunity to make a fresh start. I dreamt about making my family proud, and to showing the world (and, more importantly, myself) that I *did* have the potential to succeed. I was in a new environment. College professors taught differently than high school teachers did, and no one at this college had any preconceived notions about me. I worked my butt off, but I actually wound up doing even worse in my college classes than high school.

A few months into this, I started to face my reality. I couldn't see the point of wasting time and money that I did not have. I was ready to quit school altogether. I told a friend about my plans and he suggested that, before I made a decision, I go with him to visit his family for the weekend. He thought that getting me away from the campus might give me some perspective. When we arrived, his father showed me around their property before dinner. Along the way, he asked how school was going for me. It was the worst question anyone could ask me at the time, and I'm sure my response stunned him. I erupted into tears. Not holding-back-the-tears crying, but straight up bawling. I could see he was taken aback by this, but his innocent question had broken the dam holding back so many pent-up emotions.

I told him the whole "boy with the broken brain" story while he listened patiently. When I was finished, he looked me directly in the eyes.

“Jim, why are you in school?” he said. “What do you want to be? What do you want to do? What do you want to have? What do you want to share?”

I didn’t have immediate answers to any of these questions because no one had ever asked me them before, but I felt as though I needed to answer them now. I started to speak, and he stopped me. He tore a couple of pieces of paper from his pocket diary and told me to write down my answers. (In this book, I’ll show you how to ask questions to learn and achieve anything faster.)

I spent the next several minutes writing a bucket list. When I was finished, I began folding up the papers and preparing to put them in my pocket. But as I was doing so, my friend’s father grabbed the pages out of my hand. I freaked out, because I didn’t think what I’d written was going to be read by anyone else, especially this complete stranger. But he opened the pages and read while I stewed in my discomfort.

It seemed as though he took hours to read what I’d written, though I’m sure it was only a minute or two. When he finished, he said, “You’re this close,” holding the index fingers on his right and left hands about a foot apart, “to getting every single thing on that list.”

That statement seemed absurd to me. I told him I couldn’t crack this list if I had 10 lifetimes. But then he took his fingers and, without expanding the distance between them, placed one on each side of my head. The space he was describing was my brain.

“That’s the key,” he said. “Come with me; I have something to show you.”

We walked back to the house where he took me to a room that I’d never seen before. It was filled wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling with books. Now remember, at that point in my life, I was not a fan of books; it was like being in a room full of snakes. But what made it even worse was that he started grabbing snakes from his shelves and handing them to me. I looked at the titles and realized these were biographies of incredible men and women throughout history, as well as some early personal-growth books such as *The Magic of Thinking Big*, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, and *Think and Grow Rich.*

“Jim, I want you to read one of these books a week.”

My first thought was, *Have you not been listening to anything I've been saying?* I didn't ask this out loud, but I did respond: "I don't know how I could do that. You know, reading doesn't come easily to me, and I have so much schoolwork to do."

He held up a finger, saying, "Don't let school interfere with your education." I later learned he was paraphrasing a quote often attributed to Mark Twain.

"Look," I said. "I understand how reading these books would be really helpful, but I don't want to make any promises I can't keep."

He paused and then reached into his pocket, pulled out my bucket list, and started reading each one out loud.

There was something about hearing my dreams in another person's voice that messed with my mind and my soul something fierce. Truth be told, many of the things on the list were things I wanted to do for my family—things my parents could never afford or would never have done for themselves even if they could afford them. Hearing this read out loud moved me in ways I didn't think possible. It deeply tapped me into my drive and purpose. (We will unleash your motivation together in Part 3.) When he was finished, I told him I would do exactly what he suggested, though secretly I had no idea how I was going to accomplish that feat.

## ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

I went back to school after the weekend, armed with the books he'd given me. On my desk were now two piles: one that I had to read for school, and one that I promised to read. The scale of what I'd agreed to registered with me. How was I going to make a dent in these piles when reading was such a labor for me? I was already struggling to get through the first pile—what was I going to do? Where would I get the time? So I didn't eat, I didn't sleep, I didn't exercise, I didn't watch television or spend time with friends. Instead, I practically lived at the library, until one night when I passed out from sheer exhaustion and fell down a flight of stairs, sustaining yet another head injury.

It wasn't until two days later that I woke up in the hospital. I thought I had died, and maybe a part of me wished that I had. It was truly a dark and

low point in life. I was wasting away, my weight was down to 117 pounds, and I was so dehydrated that I was hooked up to IV bags.



As miserable as I was, I said to myself, “There has to be a better way.” At that moment, a nurse came into my room, carrying a mug of tea with a picture of Einstein on it, the very same subject of the book report that inspired me to dig deep and study back in grade school. The quote next to his image said, “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.”

That’s when it dawned on me: Maybe I was asking the wrong question. I started to wonder, what was my *real* problem? I knew I was a slow learner, but I had been thinking the same way about it for years. I realized that I was trying to solve my learning problems by thinking the way I’d been taught to think—to just work harder. But what if I could teach myself a better method

to learn? What if I could learn in a way that was more efficient, effective, and even enjoyable? What if I could learn how to learn faster?

I committed in that very moment to finding that way, and with that commitment, my mindset began to shift.

I asked the nurse for a course bulletin and flipped through it, page by page. After a couple hundred pages, I could find nothing but classes on *what* to learn—Spanish, history, math, science—but there were no classes teaching students *how* to learn.

## LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

When I got out of the hospital, I was so intrigued by the idea of learning how to learn that I set my studies aside and focused only on the books that my mentor gave me, as well as books I found on adult learning theory, multiple intelligence theory, neuroscience, personal growth, educational psychology, speed reading, and even ancient mnemonics (I wanted to know what older cultures did to pass on knowledge before they had external storage devices like the printing press and computers). I was obsessed to solve this riddle: How does my brain work, so I can work my brain?

About a couple months of deep immersion into my new self-directed studies, a light switch flipped on. My ability to focus was stronger. I started to understand new concepts because I was able to concentrate—I was no longer easily distracted. I could better recall information that I had studied weeks before with little difficulty. I had a new level of energy and curiosity. For the first time in my life, I could read and comprehend information in a fraction of the time that it used to take. My newfound competence gave me a sense of confidence that I'd never felt before. My daily life changed too—I was clear, I knew what to do to move myself forward, and I unlocked an empowering and sustainable sense of motivation. With these results, my mindset changed and I started to believe that anything was possible.

But I was also upset. It seemed to me all of my years of self-doubt and suffering could have been avoided if this critical method of meta learning (learning how to learn) had been taught in school. I remember teachers telling me constantly to study and concentrate harder. Telling a child to do things like "concentrate" is like telling them to play the ukulele; it's very difficult to do without ever being taught how.

And, following the hero's journey, I couldn't help but share the treasure and lessons I learned. I started tutoring these methods to other students. The turning point came when I worked with a freshman who wanted to learn how to read faster, boost comprehension, and retain the information she was studying. She worked diligently and achieved her goal of reading 30 books in 30 days. I knew how she did it—I taught her the method you'll learn in Chapter 14—but I wanted to know why. I discovered that her motivation was that her mother had been diagnosed with a terminal cancer, and she was determined to save her by studying books on health, wellness, and medicine. Months later, she called me, crying tears of joy, to tell me that her mother's cancer was in remission.

It was in that moment that I realized that if knowledge is power, then learning is our superpower. And our capacity to learn is limitless; we simply need to be shown how to access it. Seeing the way this woman's life was changed ignited in me a purpose, allowing me to recognize what became my life's mission: to teach the mindset, motivation, and methods to upgrade your brain and learn anything faster so you can unlock your exceptional life.

Over the course of more than two decades, I've developed a reliable and proven set of practical methods to enhance learning, many of which appear in this book. I have not only kept my promise to read a book a week, but continue to serve and support everyone from children labeled "learning disabled," to seniors with brain-aging challenges. Our team, dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, passionately supports Alzheimer's research. And we believe education is every child's birthright, funding the creation of schools around the world from Guatemala to Kenya, providing health care, clean water, and learning for children in need via amazing organizations such as WE Charity and Pencils of Promise. That's our mission—to build better brighter brains. We're leaving no brain behind.

I've taught these techniques to others with astonishing results, leading me to address more than 150,000 people in live audiences each year in every field imaginable, to serve as the brain coach to top personalities in sports and entertainment, to train at many of the world's leading companies and universities, to head a large accelerated learning online platform with students from 195 countries, and to host a top educational podcast called Kwik Brain, with tens of millions of downloads and to have my teachings receive hundreds of millions of video views. This book is filled with lessons

and practical advice I've learned over the years, along with wisdom and resources from many of the guest experts who have been featured on our show.

I say all of this because, having dedicated my life to researching and teaching this subject, I know what's inside this book and, more importantly, I know what's inside you.

## FINDING PROFESSOR X'S SCHOOL

There's a serendipitous coda to this story. As I mentioned, I regularly offer brain coaching to CEOs and their teams. A few years ago, Jim Gianopulos, then CEO and Chairman of 20th Century Fox, invited me to do a coaching session with his executive team. I went onto the film lot on a Friday morning and spent several hours with top staff members. They were particularly open to my message, and they instantly connected with the techniques.

When the session was over, Jim came up to me and said, "That was incredible. It was one of the very best training sessions we've ever held." I was delighted to hear this, of course. Who doesn't love positive feedback? Later, during a tour of the lot, my eye landed on a poster for the Wolverine movie, which was scheduled to come out later that year. I pointed to the poster and said, "I can't wait to see that film. I'm a huge fan."

"Oh, you like superheroes?" Jim said.

"Love 'em. The X-Men have played a major role in my life." I went on to tell him about my childhood brain injury, how comic books helped me learn to read, and my search for Professor X's school.

He smiled at me. "You know, we have another 30 days of shooting on the next X-Men movie in Montreal. Why don't you come along and spend a week on the set? The actors would love to work with you."

There was no way I was going to turn this down. I'd never been on a movie set before, and this wasn't just any movie set—it was an X-Men movie set.

The next morning, we got on the plane they called the *X-Jet*. The other passengers included most of the mutant cast, and I found myself sitting between Jennifer Lawrence and Halle Berry. This was turning out to be the best day ever.

On the plane and the next week on set, I got to share some of my brain tips for speed-reading scripts and for remembering lines with some of the extraordinary cast and crew. And guess what? The very first scene I got to see them shoot took place in Professor X's school—the very place I'd spent endless days imagining and searching for when I was a kid. It was such a surreal moment for me. What's one of your dreams? One that is ever present, like a splinter in your brain? Imagine it in vivid detail. Visualize it. Feel it. Believe it. And work daily for it.

Amazingly, that's not the best part of this story. When I got back from the trip, I came home to find a package waiting for me. It was huge, about the size of a large flat-screen TV. I opened the package and pulled out an enormous framed photograph of me with the entire X-Men cast. The photo had a note from the chairman, which read:

**Jim, thank you so much for sharing your superpowers with all of us. I know you've been looking for your superhero school ever since you were a child. Here's your class photo.**

See the actual full-color superhero photo at
LimitlessBook.com/classphoto.

## UNLIMITING TOGETHER

**unlimiting**

un·lim·it·ing ***(noun)***

The act or process of casting aside inaccurate and restrictive perceptions of one's potential and embracing the reality that, with the right mindset, motivation, and methods, there are no limitations.

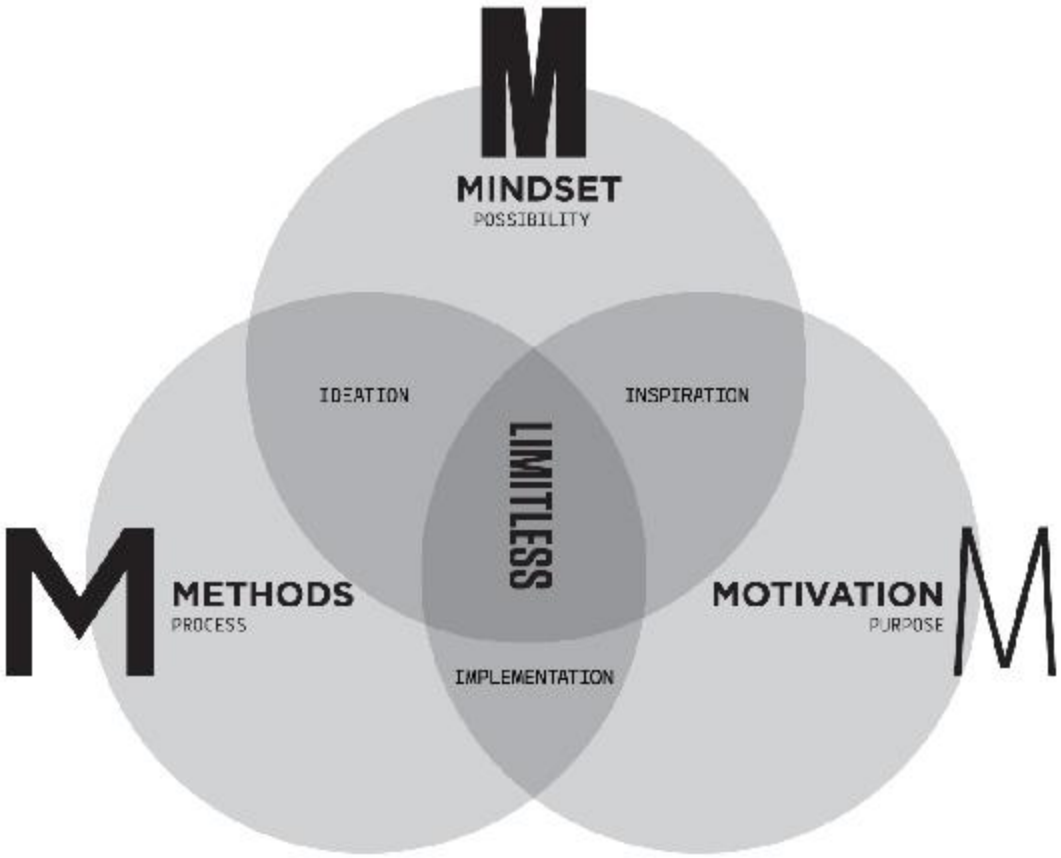
For so much of my life, I allowed myself to be defined by my perceived restrictions. I'd gotten what I thought was a terrible break when I was a kid, and I was convinced that this had set the course for a compromised future. But, with the help of some key people, I came to discover that my perceived

restrictions were not really restrictions at all. They were merely obstacles I needed to overcome or limitations I needed to unlearn. And when I did, what I could learn to be or do each day became limitless.

Becoming limitless is not just about accelerated learning, speed-reading, and having an incredible memory. Yes, you will learn how to do all of that and more. But being limitless is not about being perfect. It's about progressing beyond what you currently believe is possible. Just as you've learned limits from your family, culture, and life experiences, you can unlearn them. These constraints are only temporary obstacles that you can learn to overcome. What I have come to find over my years of working with people is that most everyone limits and shrinks their dreams to fit their current reality. We convince ourselves that the circumstances we are in, the beliefs we've accepted, and the path we are on is who we are and who we will always be. But there is another choice. You can learn to unlimit and expand your mindset, your motivation, and your methods to create a limitless life. When you do what others won't, you can live how others can't. By reading this book, you have taken an important step. Remember, one step in a better direction can completely change your destination.

The key when you are taking your steps is to have a map, a model of success. Armed with this there, is no trial or dragon you can't overcome. So here it is:

## *The Limitless Model*




## THE LIMITLESS MODEL

You can learn to be, do, have, and share with no constraints. I wrote this book to prove this to you. If you are not learning or living at your full potential, if there is a gap between your current reality and your desired reality, here's the reason: There is a limit that must be released and replaced in one of three areas:

- A limit in your Mindset—you entertain a low belief in yourself, your capabilities, what you deserve, or what is possible.
- A limit in your Motivation—you lack the drive, purpose, or energy to take action.
- A limit in your Methods—you were taught and are acting on a process that is not effective to create the results you desire.

This applies to an individual, a family, an organization. We all have our own unique story of struggles and strengths. Whatever your situation happens to be, here's the best part: You're not alone. I'm going to help you become limitless in your own way, within the three-part framework you're about to learn: Limitless Mindset, Limitless Motivation, and Limitless Methods. Let me break it down:

- Mindset (the WHAT): deeply held beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions we create about who we are, how the world works, what we are capable of and deserve, and what is possible.
- Motivation (the WHY): the purpose one has for taking action. The energy required for someone to behave in a particular way.
- Method (the HOW): a specific process for accomplishing something, especially an orderly, logical, or systematic way of instruction.

One other note about the diagram on the previous page. You'll see that where mindset crosses over with motivation, I have the word *inspiration.* You're inspired, but you don't know which methods to employ or where to channel your energy. Where motivation and method intersect, you have *implementation.* In this case, your results are going to be limited to what you feel you deserve, what you feel you are capable of, and what you believe is possible because you lack the proper mindset. Where mindset and method intersect, you have *ideation.* Your ambitions stay in your mind, because you lack the energy to do anything about them. Where all three intersect, you have the limitless state. You then have the fourth *I,* which is *integration.*

Throughout this book, you'll find exercises, studies, mental tools, and the results of exciting work being done both on the frontier of cognitive science and performance as well as ancient wisdom (for example, how ancient civilizations remembered generations of knowledge before external storage devices like the printing press). We'll approach the 3 M's in turn:

- In Part II, Limitless Mindset, you'll learn what is *possible* when you eradicate limiting beliefs.
- In Part III, Limitless Motivation, you'll discover why your *purpose* is your power and keys to unleash your drive and energy.

- In Part IV, Limitless Methods, you'll discover how to learn at your best with proven *processes*—the tools and techniques that will propel you forward toward the life you desire and deserve.

And, at the end of the book, I give you a 10-day plan to jump-start your progress toward a limitless week and a limitless life.

When you finish this book, you'll have the ability to be limitless in any area important to you, whether it's academic, health, career, relationships, or personal growth. Since I never truly got to study at the X-Men school, I created it for you in our online Kwik Learning Academy, where people of all ages from 195 nations train with us daily to unleash their mental superpowers. Consider *Limitless* your textbook. It would be an honor to be your Professor X, and I'm so excited that you've decided to take this journey with me. Class is now in session. And here's the best part; your timing could not be any better.

"We now accept
the fact that learning
is a lifelong process of
keeping abreast
of change. And the
most pressing task
is to teach people
how to learn."



—PETER DRUCKER

# 2

# WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

I'm a firm believer that we all have incredible superpowers that are waiting to be awakened. I'm not talking about the ability to fly, create iron-clad armor, or shoot lasers from your eyes, but real-life practical abilities like flying through books, iron-clad memory, laser focus, boundless creativity, clear thinking, mindfulness, superior mental attitude, and more. We are all superheroes in one way or another.

Just as every superhero has powers, so do they have arch nemeses. Enter the supervillain. Think the Joker to Batman, Lex Luthor to Superman. The villains we face may not look the same as they do in the movies, but they're still the bad guys—the ones you, as a superhero, need to vanquish and hold at bay. Modern-day supervillains get in our way and make life harder, keeping us from our potential. They hold us back and rob us of our productivity, prosperity, positivity, and peace of mind. And it's up to us to recognize and defeat them.

If you've ever read a comic book or watched a superhero movie, you know that supervillains are often borne of unlikely places. Take Harvey Dent, also known as Two-Face, for example. He starts out with the greatest of intentions—he's a prosecutor helping to uphold the law and put the bad guys in jail, and he's an ally of Batman. But through an act of revenge, Dent's face is scarred, and he turns angry, bitter, and vengeful. He becomes what he had spent his life fighting: a duplicitous criminal who gambles with his victims' futures. The good in him becomes twisted and used for sinister ends.

In the same way, the four supervillains of learning started out innocent—they are being fed by some of the greatest advancements that humankind has made in the last hundred years. They were given rise by technology. To

be clear, technology is a vital part of progress and being limitless. It allows us to do everything from connecting to learning, making our lives that much more convenient. But it is possible that we consume digital technology at a rate that even its creators would find extreme. Much of the technology available to us today is so new that we don't know the level at which we need to control our interaction with it.

Through our educational platform Kwik Learning, we have students in 195 countries and have generated tens of millions of podcast downloads. Our community has expressed a growing concern about their overreliance on technology and they come to us to upgrade their brains to find relief from these "four horsemen" of our age: digital deluge, digital distraction, digital dementia, and digital deduction. It's important to note that overload, distraction, forgetfulness, and default thinking have been around for ages. While technology doesn't cause these conditions, it has great potential to amplify them. The benefits of the digital age are plentiful, but let's take a look at how the advances in technology that help you, can possibly also hinder you.

## DIGITAL DELUGE

Do you have too much to process but not enough time? We're privileged to live in a world with so much unfettered access to information. In this age of connectivity, ignorance is a choice. Compared to the 15th century, we now consume as much data in a single day as an average person from the 1400s would have absorbed in an entire lifetime. Not so long ago, information moved glacially through word of mouth, or a newspaper, or a posted bulletin in a town square. Now we have so much access to information that it's taking a toll on our time and our quality of life. The average person consumes three times as much information as we did in the 1960s;[1] a 2015 report indicated that respondents spent eight hours a day consuming media.

In an NPR interview, *New York Times* tech reporter Matt Richtel said that after 20 years of glorifying technology as if all of it were good, "I think science is beginning to embrace the idea that some technology is Twinkies and some technology is Brussels sprouts. If we consume too much technology, just like if we consume too much food, it can have ill effects."[2]

In a University of California, San Francisco, study on the effect of downtime, researchers gave rats a new experience and measured their brain waves during and after the activity. Under most circumstances, a new experience will express new neural activity and new neurons in the brain—that is, if the rat is allowed to have downtime. With downtime, the neurons made their way from the gateway of memory to the rest of the brain, where long-term memory is stored. The rats were able to record memories of their experiences, which is the basis for learning.[3]

Doesn't that make you wonder what happens if you *don't* have downtime? There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that if we never let our mind wander or be bored for a moment, we pay a price—poor memory, mental fog, and fatigue.

As far back as the mid-1990s (when digital deluge was a fraction of the concern it is now), research was beginning to show that there were real health risks involved with navigating through an always-on world. A Reuters study, ominously titled "Dying for Information," showed that, "Two out of three respondents associated information overload with tension with colleagues and loss of job satisfaction; 42 percent attributed ill-health to this stress, 61 percent said that they have to cancel social activities as a result of information overload and 60 percent that they are frequently too tired for leisure activities." The study goes on to add, "Faced with an onslaught of information and information channels, they have become unable to develop simple routines for managing information."[4]

What's more, we also have to contend with the fact that the half-life of information has decreased. The half-life of information is the amount of time that passes before that information is replaced by newer or more accurate information. You can study to your heart's content; the information you process now will be outdated sooner than you think. "Facts" written in articles, books, and documentaries are based on strong evidence and accepted as truth. But then they are completely reversed when a new study comes out.

I don't need to tell you how completely inundated each of us is with digital details. Even when we try to go "off the grid," digital information somehow finds us. While I'm writing this, I've shut down all my devices. But I need to have access to the Internet for research purposes, and a handful of random notifications and updates still popped up on my computer (yes, I know I can turn these off as well, but you get my point).

In Chapter 12 (Study) and Chapter 14 (Speed Reading), you will discover practical ways to catch up, keep up, and get ahead of the digital deluge of information you must process each day.

***KWIK START***

Take a moment and schedule 30 minutes of white space in your calendar for this week. This is time to be spent away from technology, time dedicated to clear your mind, relax, and be creative.

## DIGITAL DISTRACTION

Before mobile devices, we would say “brb” (be right back) all the time when we were online. We don’t say it anymore. We no longer leave. We live here now. Because of our always-on, ever-connected devices, we’re struggling to find connection when we’re with friends and family, and we’re struggling to stay focused at work. Most of us deal with some kind of work-life situation where we don’t feel comfortable forgoing digital connection for large swaths of time every day. So we stay on the grid out of the fear that if we were unreachable, we would lose out.

The trouble is, we’re wired to enjoy it. Each successive hit of dopamine we get from the likes we receive on social media, or from the texts we get from loved ones or friends, only reinforces our behavior. But those rewards are changing our brains. Instead of relaxing into the downtime that we might experience when waiting in line, waiting for a bus or an appointment, etc., we pull out our phones and train our distraction muscles. What happens when this is our constant way of being, when every loose moment is filled with shining stimulus?

Staying connected may make us feel more secure, but it doesn’t make us happier. Ryan Dwyer, MA, of the University of British Columbia, led a study that showed how our digital habits are affecting our relationships. In one experiment, more than 300 adults and university students were asked to keep their phones on the table, easily accessible, while others were asked to put them on silent and keep them in a container on the table during a meal. Afterward, participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire that asked

them about their feelings of connectedness, enjoyment, distraction, and boredom.

The survey also asked them to detail the amount of time they spent on their phone during the meal. Those whose phones were accessible used them more often . . . and they described themselves as feeling more distracted. They also enjoyed the dinner less than the diners who didn't have access to their phones. "Modern technology may be wonderful, but it can easily sidetrack us and take away from the special moments we have with friends and family in person," Dwyer says of the study.[5]

Just as few of us have learned how to learn, not many know how to process and filter the massive amount of information we are constantly seeing. We just multitask to get all of it in, and this doesn't serve us well. "Asking the brain to shift attention from one activity to another causes the prefrontal cortex and striatum to burn up oxygenated glucose, the same fuel they need to stay on task," notes neuroscientist Daniel J. Levitin in his book, *The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload*. "And the kind of rapid, continual shifting we do with multitasking causes the brain to burn through fuel so quickly that we feel exhausted and disoriented after even a short time. We've literally depleted the nutrients in our brain. This leads to compromises in both cognitive and physical performance."[6]

From app notifications to message alerts, it's not just adults who deal with this. With the availability of technology and social pressure to be online and active on social media, children and teenagers experience the constant distraction, too.

In Chapter 11 (Focus), you will discover the keys to sustained concentration and focus development to learn and get things done.

***KWIK START***

Go to the notification settings of your phone and turn off all unnecessary and distracting pings and dings. Do this now.

## DIGITAL DEMENTIA

When is the last time you had to remember someone's phone number? I'm dating myself here, but I'm part of a generation that, when you wanted to call your friend down the block, you needed to *know* their number. Can you still remember some of your best friends' numbers from childhood? What about the number of the person you talk or text with every day? You no longer have to, because your mobile remembers it for you. This is not to say anyone wants to or should memorize 200 phone numbers, but we've all but lost the ability to remember a new one, or a conversation we just had, the name of a new potential client, or something important we need to do.

Neuroscientist Manfred Spitzer uses the term *digital dementia* to describe how overuse of digital technology results in the breakdown of cognitive abilities. He argues that short-term memory pathways will start to deteriorate from underuse if we overuse technology. It's the same with GPS. Move to a new city and see how quickly you become reliant on GPS to tell you how to get around. Then notice how long it takes you to map new roads in your mind—probably much longer than when you were younger, but not because your brain isn't working as well. With tools like GPS, we don't give our minds the chance to work. We rely on technology to do the memorization for us.

This reliance may be hurting our long-term memory. Maria Wimber of the University of Birmingham told the BBC that the trend of looking up information prevents the build-up of long-term memories. In a study that examined the memory habits of 6,000 adults in the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, Wimber and her team found that more than a third of respondents turned to their computer first to retrieve information. The UK came in the highest—more than half of the participants searched online first without trying to come up with the answer themselves.[7]

Why is this a big deal? Because such instant information can be easily and immediately forgotten. "Our brain appears to strengthen a memory each time we recall it, and at the same time forget irrelevant memories that are distracting us," said Dr. Wimber. Forcing yourself to recall information instead of relying on an outside source to supply it for you is a way of creating and strengthening a permanent memory. When you contrast that with the reality that most of us have a habit of constantly looking up information—maybe even the same information—without bothering to try to remember it, it seems we're doing ourselves harm.

Is relying on technology always bad? Many researchers disagree. The argument goes that by outsourcing some menial tasks like memorizing phone numbers or doing basic math or getting directions to a restaurant we've visited before, we're saving brain space for something that matters more to us. There's research that says our brains are more like a muscle, rather than a hard drive that fills up. That the more you use it, the stronger it gets, and the more it can store. The question is: Are we making those choices consciously, or are we acting out of unconscious habit?

Too often, we outsource our brains to our smart devices, and our smart devices are making us, well, a little bit stupid. Our brains are the ultimate adaptation machines, capable of seemingly endless levels of evolution. And yet we often forget to give it the exercise it needs. Just as there is a physical price to always relying on the technology of the elevator instead of taking the stairs, so is there a price for lazy mental muscles. Use it or lose it.

In Chapter 13 (Memory), I will show you simple tools and techniques to remember anything from names and speeches to languages, faster and easier.

***KWIK START***

Take a minute to exercise your memory: Memorize the phone number of someone you communicate with regularly.

## DIGITAL DEDUCTION

"In a digital-first world, where millennials obtain all their answers to problems at the click of a mouse or swipe of a finger, the reliance on technology to solve every question confuses people's perception of their own knowledge and intelligence. And that reliance may well lead to overconfidence and poor decision-making," says Rony Zarom, founder of the video collaboration platform newrow.[8] The ubiquity of information about everything also means that there's a ubiquity of opinion about everything. If you want to know how to feel about a hot-button issue, you can just go online and collate the opinions of others. If you want to know the implications of an event or a trend, a quick online search will provide

endless amounts of analysis. The upshot is that deduction—an amalgam of critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity that is an essential skill for being limitless—is becoming automated.

There's a certain amount of value to this, of course. Before the Internet, we were limited in our access to the opinions of others. In an ideal world, being able to get as many perspectives on a topic as possible would be enormously valuable in helping us to form our own opinions. Unfortunately, that's rarely how it plays out in the real world. Instead, we tend to identify a handful of sources with which we align and then give those sources extreme influence over our thinking and decision-making. In the process, the "muscles" we use to think critically and reason effectively are atrophying. We're letting technology do the deduction for us. And if technology is forming our deductions, then we are also ceding much of our problem-solving ability—something so important and something we will discuss at length later in this book.

Psychologist Jim Taylor defines thinking as, "The capacity to reflect, reason, and draw conclusions based on our experiences, knowledge, and insights. It's what makes us human and has enabled us to communicate, create, build, advance, and become civilized." He then goes on to caution that there is "a growing body of research that technology can be both beneficial and harmful to different ways in which children think."[9]

Patricia Marks Greenfield, Distinguished Professor of Psychology at UCLA, has been looking at this issue for more than a decade. In discussing the impact on education, she wrote, "What is the effect on learning if college students use their laptops to access the Internet during a classroom lecture? This was tested in a communication studies class where students were generally encouraged to use their laptops during lectures, in order to explore lecture topics in greater detail on the Internet and in library databases. Half of the students were allowed to keep their laptops open, while the other half (randomly assigned) had to close their laptops. Students in the closed laptop condition recalled significantly more material in a surprise quiz after class than did students in the open laptop condition."[10] Because they were engaging their minds in the lecture rather than looking for what the Internet already thought about the subject, they were much more responsive when it was time to reason for themselves. Greenfield analyzed another study that showed that college students who watched a

news program without the crawl at the bottom of the screen remembered significantly more of what the anchors were discussing.

Playwright Richard Foreman fears that this reliance on the Internet to do much of our thinking is changing our very selves. “I come from a tradition of Western culture, in which the ideal (my ideal) was the complex, dense and ‘cathedral-like’ structure of the highly educated and articulate personality—a man or woman who carried inside themselves a personally constructed and unique version of the entire heritage of the West . . . . But today I see within us all (myself included) the replacement of complex inner density with a new kind of self-evolving under the pressure of information overload and the technology of the ‘instantly available.’”[11]

Do you remember what it was like when you were approaching your teens and you first started formulating thoughts and opinions independent of your parents? My guess is that this experience was extremely liberating for you and that it might have even been the first time in your life when you truly felt like your own person. What had happened to you, of course, was that your critical faculties had become refined enough to allow you to regularly employ reason to navigate through life.

Why, then, would you want to turn this liberating skill over to a device? Think about it: How do you feel when someone tries to impose their thinking on you? If a family member, friend, or colleague came up to you and said, “Don’t think about this; here’s your opinion,” you’d try to get away from that person as soon as you possibly could. Yet, when we immediately reach for the Internet to provide us with information, we’re essentially inviting the same thing.

In Chapter 15, I will provide you with a powerful set of tools that will allow you to supercharge your thinking and expand your perspective on any topic or problem.

While these four horsemen are the ones we need to contend with most vociferously, there’s another digital danger that is worthy of our attention. I call this *digital depression*, a result of the comparison culture that emerges when we let the highlight reels of the social media feeds of others cause us to perceive ourselves as less than. Now, I enjoy social media. I love staying connected with our community of students and podcast listeners and staying updated with the everyday lives of my family and friends. I appreciate it so much as not only a source of entertainment, but also education and empowerment. But I only recommend using it consciously, not mindlessly

out of habit, and in a harmonious way so it doesn't highjack your productivity and peace of mind.

In the upcoming Part II: Limitless Mindset, I share ideas to mitigate these feelings of not being enough, as well as fears of looking bad or missing out. Those are the same limits that stand in the way of personal growth and learning. In Part III: Limitless Motivation, I will show you how to add, break, or change these habits.

***KWIK START***

Think about a decision you need to make. Schedule some time to work on that decision without the use of any digital devices.

## KEEPING THE VILLAINS AT BAY

In the hero's journey, the heroes need villains just as much as villains need heroes. The challenges from trials and rivals make us grow and become better. The power and strength of the villain determines the necessary power and strength of the hero. If the villain was weak, there would be nothing to vanquish—and no need for the hero to rise to greatness. In my podcast interview with Simon Sinek, author of *The Infinite Game*, Simon refers to our "worthy rivals," those who help point out the personal weaknesses we need to address. That is where your opportunity lies.

As I mentioned, I love the light side of technology—how it can connect us, educate us, and empower us, make our lives easier. What we've just described are a few potential drawbacks of technology, which is an inherent part of all the good that it brings into our lives. Like fire, technology has changed the course of human history. However, fire can cook your food or burn your home down—it's all in how you use it. Like any tool, technology itself isn't good or bad, but we must consciously control how it's used. If we don't, then who becomes the tool? It's up to you to choose how you engage.

***KWIK START***

Which of the four digital villains do you believe are currently most disrupting your performance, productivity, and peace of mind? Take a moment and write the name of this villain down.

Conscious awareness is the first part to solving a problem.

"The human brain has 100 billion neurons, each neuron connected to 10,000 other neurons. Sitting on your shoulders is the most complicated object in the known universe."



—MICHIO KAKU

# 3

# YOUR LIMITLESS BRAIN

You may be thinking, *Jim, I see what you mean about technology. I wouldn't want to live without it, but I do feel more overloaded, distracted, and forgetful than ever.* Here's the good news: You were born with the ultimate technology, the greatest superpower.

Let's take a moment to acknowledge just how extraordinary your brain is. It generates up to 70,000 thoughts per day. It races with the speed of the fastest race car. Like your fingerprints, it is uniquely yours—there aren't two brains in the universe exactly the same. It processes dramatically faster than any existing computer, and it has virtually infinite storage capacity. Even when damaged, it is capable of producing genius, and even if you only have half a brain, you can still be a fully functioning human being.

And remarkable stories about it abound. Like the one about the comatose patient who somehow developed a method of communication with his doctor. Or the woman who could recall important events *by date* going back as far as when she was 12 years old. Or the slacker who became a mathematical genius after suffering a concussion during a bar fight. None of this is science fiction or the product of a superhero comic. They're just examples of the extraordinary function built into that remarkable machine between your ears.

We take so much of that function for granted. Let's think about just what the average person has accomplished simply by being an "average" person. By the age of one, you learned how to walk, no simple task considering how many complex neurological and physiological processes are required. A year or so after that, you learned how to communicate through the use of words and language. You learned dozens of new words and their meanings on a daily basis and kept doing so all the way through school. And while

you were learning to communicate, you were also learning to reason, to calculate, and to parse an endless number of complex concepts—and all of that was before you read a single page of a book or attended one class!

Our brains are what separate us from the rest of the animal kingdom. Think about it. We can't fly, we aren't particularly strong or fast, we can't climb with the dexterity of some animals, we can't breathe underwater. As far as most physical functions are concerned, we're just average. But because of the power of our brains, we are overwhelmingly Earth's most dominant species. By harnessing that incredible mental power, we have created ways to explore the ocean depths like a fish, move tons of weight like an elephant, and even fly like a bird. Yes, the brain is quite a gift.

The brain is so complex that we know more about our vast universe than we do about its workings, and we've learned more about it in the past decade than we'd previously learned over the course of human history . . . and we'll learn even more about it from the time this book goes to press to the time it hits the bookshelves. Our understanding of the brain is ever evolving, and we know that what we've learned about it is only a tiny fraction of what there is to be learned. But what we already know is staggering. So, let's take a journey through your limitless brain.

The brain is part of the central nervous system (CNS). Similar to the control tower at an airport, your brain acts as its control center, directing all the comings and goings of information, processes, and impulses. The brain has three major areas: the brain stem, the cerebellum, and the cerebral cortex (both the cerebellum and cerebral cortex start with *cere*, Latin for "wax," because of its waxy appearance). The brain is made of fat and water, weighs approximately three pounds, and facilitates incredible power and ability.[1]

The brain stem moderates the basic functions we need to live, such as breathing, maintaining a regular heart rate, impulses to eat or have sex, and our fight-or-flight responses. It is located at the top of your spine and the base of your skull, buried deep within the brain. At the back of the brain, the cerebellum is responsible for moderating movement and coordination. There's also increasing evidence that it plays a role in our decision-making.

The cerebral cortex is the largest part of our brain, where the majority of our complex thinking, short-term memory, and sensory stimulation take place. It is made up of the occipital, parietal, temporal, and frontal lobes.

Our frontal lobes are where most of our thinking takes place: where logic and creativity derive.

The brain is split into two halves that are connected by the corpus callosum, which acts like a bundle of telephone wires between the lobes, sending messages back and forth. Right now, you have somewhere around 86 billion neurons (also called brain cells) firing and acting together in concert as you read these words and assimilate the information on these pages.[2] These neural signals are released into the brain and received by neurotransmitters, which then pass the message along to other neurotransmitters or stop the message altogether if that's the appropriate response.

We used to think that we reached our neurological peak in late adolescence, after which our brains never changed—other than to deteriorate. We now know that this is far from the truth. Our brains have the capacity for neuroplasticity, which means that it can be changed and shaped by our actions and by our environments. Your brain is always changing and molding itself to your surroundings and to the demands you place on it.

Because our brains are subject to the influence of our genes and environment, we each possess a brain that is entirely unique to us. They're like snowflakes; no two are alike. Each brain adapts to the needs of its owner. Let's look at someone raised in an environment that was full of stressors such as poverty, lack of access to food, or lack of safety. That person will have a very different brain structure than someone brought up in a very comfortable, affluent, well-cared-for setting. But before you jump to the conclusion that one environment is "better" than the other and breeds a better functioning brain, I challenge you to reconsider.

As I stated earlier, the brain is capable of being molded and shaped, meaning that at any point anyone can decide to change the way their brain functions. While it's easy to assume that the individual who grew up in a more stressful, unsupportive environment may not wind up reaching their full potential due to their brain's development under those circumstances, growing evidence suggests those people are able to thrive and reach new levels of success due to the mindset they are forced to develop in such a situation. Based on the number of successful people who overcame troubled upbringings, it may be that a difficult childhood or challenging upbringing breeds resilience among other attributes that lead to success.

# UNDERSTANDING NEUROPLASTICITY

What can we learn from the brains of London taxicab drivers?

This is the question neuroscientist Eleanor Maguire of University College London posed as she considered the vast amount of information held in the brains of the city's cab drivers, appropriately called "The Knowledge." To earn their licenses, applicants traveled by moped through a specific section of the city—a 10-kilometer radius of Charing Cross station—for three to four years, memorizing the maze of 25,000 streets within as well as the thousands of attractions they supported. Even after this intense study, only about 50 percent of applicants pass the series of licensing exams. Perhaps, thought Maguire, those successful had larger than average hippocampi.

Maguire and her colleagues discovered that London taxi drivers did indeed have "more gray matter in their posterior hippocampi than people who were similar in age, education, and intelligence who did not drive taxis. In other words, taxi drivers had plumper memory centers than their peers. It seemed that the longer someone had been driving a taxi, the larger his hippocampus, as though the brain expanded to accommodate the cognitive demands of navigating London's streets."[3]

The London Taxi Cab Study provides a compelling example of the brain's neuroplasticity, or ability to reorganize and transform itself as it is exposed to learning and new experiences. Having to constantly learn new routes in the city forced the taxi cab drivers' brains to create new neural pathways. These pathways changed the structure and size of the brain, an amazing example of the limitless brain at work.

Neuroplasticity, also referred to as brain plasticity, means that every time you learn something new, your brain makes a new synaptic connection. And each time this happens, your brain physically changes–it upgrades its hardware to reflect a new level of the mind.

Neuroplasticity is dependent on the ability of our neurons to grow and make connections with other neurons in other parts of the brain. It works by making new connections and strengthening (or weakening, as the case may be) old ties.[4]

Our brain is malleable. We have the incredible ability to change its structure and organization over time by forming new neural pathways as we experience, learn something new, and adapt. Neuroplasticity helps explain how anything is possible. Researchers hold that all brains are flexible in that

the complex webs of connected neurons can be rewired to form new connections. Sometimes, that means the brain compensates for something it has lost, as when one hemisphere learns to function for both. Just as there are people who have suffered strokes and have been able to rebuild and regain their brain functions, those that procrastinate, think excessive negative thoughts, or can't stop eating junk food may also rewire and change their behaviors and transform their lives.

If learning is making new connections, then remembering is maintaining and sustaining those connections. When we struggle with memory or experience memory impairment, we are likely experiencing a disconnection between neurons. In learning, when you fail to remember something, view it as a failure to make a connection between what you've learned and what you already know, and with how you will use it in life.

For example, if you feel that something you've learned is valuable in the moment, but that you'll never use it again, you are unlikely to create a memory of it. Similarly, if you learn something but have no higher reasoning as to why it's important to you or how it applies to your life or work, then it's likely that your brain will not retain the information. It's totally normal to have a memory lapse—we're human, not robots. But if we respond to this lapse in memory with the attitude that "I have a bad memory," or "I'm not smart enough to remember this," then we negatively affect our ability to learn and grow. In other words, the belief we might develop in response to forgetting does far more damage than the lapse in memory. That kind of self-talk reinforces a limiting belief, rather than acknowledging the mistake and reacquiring the information.

What does this mean for learning? Plasticity means that you can mold and shape your brain to suit your desires. That something like your memory is trainable—when you know how to help your brain receive, encode, process, and consolidate information. It means that with a few simple changes to something like your environment, your food, or your exercise, you can dramatically change the way your brain functions. I will share these energy tips in detail in Chapter 8.

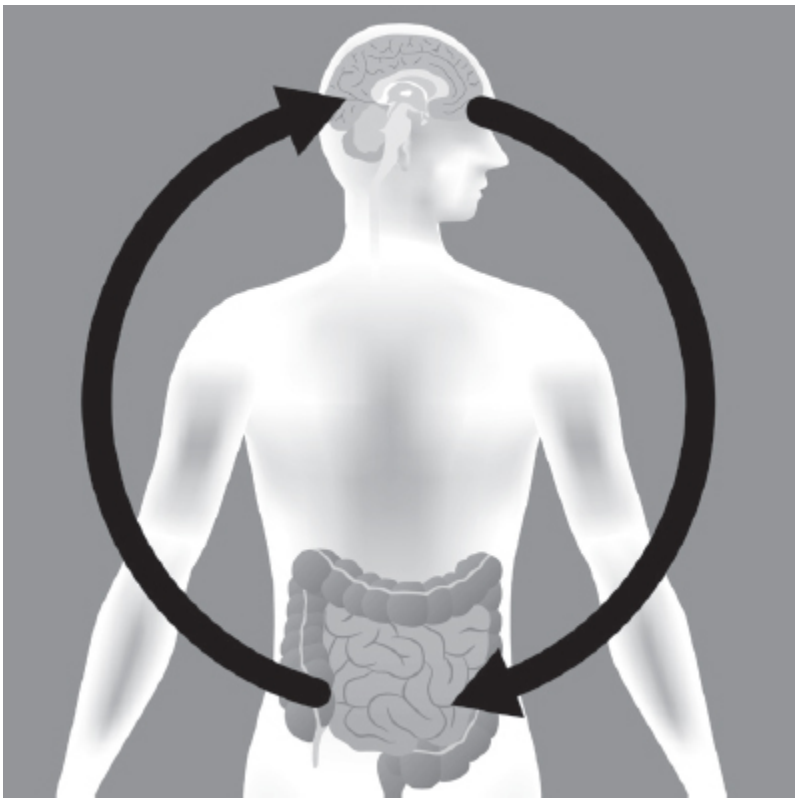
Here's the bottom line: Plasticity means that your learning, and indeed your life, is not fixed. You can be, do, have, and share anything when you optimize and rewire your brain. There are no limitations when you align and apply the right mindset, motivation, and methods.

# YOUR SECOND BRAIN

My students tell me after they learn about the vastness of their brain, they have a whole new sense of worth, that their self-esteem grows overnight. Here's more good news: You are not limited to just one brain, you have a second—your gut. Have you ever had a "gut feeling"? That moment when you just knew? If you've ever "gone with your gut" to make a decision or felt "butterflies in your stomach," did you ever wonder why that was? Hidden in the walls of the digestive system, this "brain in your gut" is revolutionizing medicine's understanding of the links between digestion, mood, health, and even the way you think.

Scientists call this little brain the enteric nervous system (ENS). And it's not so little. The ENS is two thin layers of more than 100 million nerve cells lining your gastrointestinal tract from esophagus to rectum. Science is only beginning to understand the brain-gut axis and how it affects our brains, our moods, and our behavior. You may hear it referred to as the "brain-gut connection." In the last decade, we've discovered that the gut has an outsize effect on the way our brains function. One can liken it to the way a tree functions. The roots in the ground are drawing up vital nutrients and water from the soil as well as communicating with other plants. Those nutrients are then brought up into the body of the tree, fortifying and building the trunk, and giving the tree what it needs to sprout new leaves each spring, which in turn gather light, another energy source.

In the same way, the nutrients we take in are absorbed through our intestines. We rely on those nutrients to fuel our brains. While our brains take up very little of our total body weight, they use 20 percent of the energy we take in, so nutrients make a huge difference in the way our brains function on a day-to-day basis.



The gut is lined with more than a hundred million nerve cells, and it makes up part of the ENS. When a baby grows in the womb, the ENS and the CNS develop from the same tissue and remain connected via the vagus nerve. In many ways, the two systems mirror each other in structure. They also both use many of the same neurotransmitters to function, including serotonin, dopamine, and acetylcholine. As with CNS, we used to believe that we are each born with a certain amount of cells—and that's it. But like the brain, we now know the ENS makes new neurons throughout adulthood and can be repaired when damaged.[5] The gut is made up of these neurons as well as a network of bacteria that form the microbiome, and as with the brain, each of us has our own unique microbiome.

What's more, these nerve cells operate through startlingly similar pathways as the brain. In 2010, neuroscientist Diego Bohórquez of Duke University discovered that the enteroendocrine cells of the gut had "footlike protrusions" that resembled the synapses that neurons use to communicate. This caused Bohórquez to wonder if these cells could "talk" to the brain using signals similar to the way neurons do. He hypothesized that if this were happening, they would have to be using the vagus nerve, which connects the gut and the brain stem.[6] After further testing, they discovered

that the cells do in fact use the vagus nerve to take up messages and send them to the brain, faster than could be done via the bloodstream.

## TEAM EFFORT

The connection between the brain and the gut is still being explored, but it seems that they function in very similar ways and that they function in tandem. The little brain in conjunction with the big one partly determines our mental state. When you have a gut feeling that something isn't right, or conversely that you should follow a hunch, it's not just superstition—your gut has its own way of interpreting events and giving your brain signals. Furthermore, when you feed your gut with subpar food, you're also feeding your brain with subpar fuel.

Right now, your gut is digesting the food you just ate and sending that fuel to your brain. At the same time, a part of your brain is taking in the feel of the pages under your fingertips (or your e-reader, if that's your preference), sensing the comfort of the chair supporting you, and monitoring the environment around you to make sure you're safe. Another part of your brain is taking in the smells of the environment, maybe coffee, or perfume, or the scent of the book's pages. Another part of your brain is absorbing the word-symbols on the page of this book and turning them into meaning, which is then processed and stored in short-term memory, where it will then be sent to long-term memory (under the right conditions, which we'll get to in a moment).

All of this is to say that you have the ultimate superpower between your ears. You also have the ability to hone that superpower and make it greater —or to let it falter and decay. You get to decide what kind of environment your superpower lives in: one that supports your mission in life, or one that distracts you from your greatest dreams.

## THE ELUSIVE OBVIOUS

Given that we have this tremendous power of our minds available to us, why are we struggling? If your brain is indeed so magnificent, why are overload, distraction, forgetfulness, and feelings of inadequacy affecting us so much? How do we reconcile the fact that we have so much potential but

have days where we can't remember a simple name or think our way out of a paper bag? The answer is so simple, it's almost the elusive obvious: We were not taught how.

Give a person an idea, and you enrich their day. Teach a person how to learn, and they can enrich their entire life.

School is a great place to learn. There, we're taught what to learn, what to think, and what to remember. But there are few if any classes on *how* to learn, *how* to think, and *how* to remember.

In his seminal book on education, *Creative Schools*, Sir Ken Robinson says, "One of my deepest concerns is that while education systems around the world are being reformed, many of these reforms are being driven by political and commercial interests that misunderstand how real people learn and how great schools actually work. As a result, they are damaging the prospects of countless young people. Sooner or later, for better or for worse, they will affect you or someone you know."[7]

My guess is that they have *already* affected you and everyone close to you. As you already know, my own experience with the education system was a complicated one, and I acknowledge that my circumstances were unusual. In reality, though, even if I'd never had that fateful head trauma in kindergarten, I would probably have gotten much less out of my school education than was ideal. That's because very few schools anywhere in the world have incorporated learning how to learn into their curriculums. They'll fill us with information. They'll expose us to great works of literature and to figures who changed the course of civilization. They will test us—sometimes endlessly—to determine whether we can repeat back what they've taught us. But they won't get underneath all of this to teach us how to teach ourselves, to make enriching our minds, discovering new concepts, and truly absorbing what we learn fundamental to our everyday lives.

"The only way to win is to learn faster than anyone else."



—ERIC RIES

This is not about placing the blame on the teachers who work hard to teach our children. In my opinion, teachers are some of the most caring, compassionate, and capable human beings in our society. In fact, my mother became a teacher after my brain injury because I was struggling so much and she wanted to help me and others like me. The problem lies in the outdated system in which teachers work. If Rip Van Winkle woke up from decades of slumber, the only thing he would recognize today are classrooms, because they have evolved so little. Education hasn't changed enough to prepare us for the world we live in today. In a era of autonomously driven electric cars and vehicles capable of taking us to Mars, our education system is the equivalent of a horse and carriage.

And then there's the matter that how we earn our livings is changing profoundly and increasingly rapidly. Automation and artificial intelligence (A.I.) are affecting the future of work, and I'm not speaking only about factories where laborers are being replaced by robots. In addition, many of us are facing the need to switch from the structure of an office job to the volatility of the gig economy. And jobs that few of us might have imagined even five years ago have gained traction, while others are emerging this very moment that will affect the workplace in the coming years.



All of this points us in the same direction: We must take charge of our own learning. If schools tell us what to learn, but not *how* to learn, then we need to do the rest of the work ourselves. If digital overload threatens to hijack our brains, then we need to use what we know about learning to reset

the ground rules. If the workplace is evolving with so much rapidity that we can never be sure of what work will mean to us tomorrow, then only by taking complete control of our learning can we truly be prepared for an unknowable future.

## TURN ON THE POWER

A quick, often-told story: One day at a power plant, everything comes to an abrupt halt. All of the machines go offline. The silence is deafening. The people running the plant are frantic and after hours and hours, none of the workers can track down the problem. The head of operations is desperate at this point, so he calls the best local help he can find.

The expert technician arrives and glances around the facility. He goes to one of the numerous beams among all the electrical boxes, opens one of them, and stares at the various screws and wires inside. He turns one screw, and, like magic, everything starts working again and the plant comes back to life.

The head of operations is *so* relieved. He thanks the technician and asks him what he owes him. The technician says, “$10,000.” The head of operations is shocked. “What do you mean, $10,000? You were here for a few minutes. You turned one single screw. Anyone could have done that. I need an itemized bill, please.”

The technician reaches into his pocket, pulls out a notepad, scribbles a few seconds, and hands the other man the bill. The head of operations reads it and immediately pays him. The bill read: “Turning screw: $1. Knowing which screw to turn: $9,999.”

What’s the lesson of the story? It’s not that you have a screw loose. The story illustrates two things.

The first is how much added value a limitless mind can offer you and others. We’ve entered an expert economy in which brain power trumps brute strength. Where what you have between your ears is your greatest wealth-creating asset. There are those who know and those who don’t know. And that applied knowledge is not just power, it’s profit. Your ability to think, solve problems, make the right decisions, create, innovate, and imagine is how we add value. The faster you can learn, the faster you can earn.

And that takes us to the second lesson. That one screw made all the difference. I've mentored and coached some amazing minds, and you don't have to be a genius to see that genius leaves clues. One of those patterns is that elite mental performers filter and focus for those handful of "screws" that make all the difference and turn everything else on. This book is filled with many of the behaviors, tools, and strategies I've discovered to give you the maximum results and rewards for your effort.

The world is throwing more challenges at you than ever before, and there's every indication that those challenges will continue to increase. At the same time, there is more to be gained from having a finely tuned brain than ever before, and you know now that you have more than enough potential to meet any challenge. But it's going to require taking control of your learning.

It may seem as if it would take superhuman capabilities to keep up with the demands of our current reality. But you already have a hidden superpower: your brain. You may not be able to shoot webs from your hands, but you have something far better, the neural webs in your head. That superpower plant of a network between your ears is your greatest gift and greatest advantage. All we have to do is upgrade your brain the same way you upgrade your phone. How do you install new software into your brain? One of my favorite ways is what you're doing right now. It's called reading.

"I not only use all
the brains that I have,
but all that
I can borrow."



—WOODROW WILSON

# 4

# HOW TO READ AND REMEMBER THIS (AND ANY) BOOK

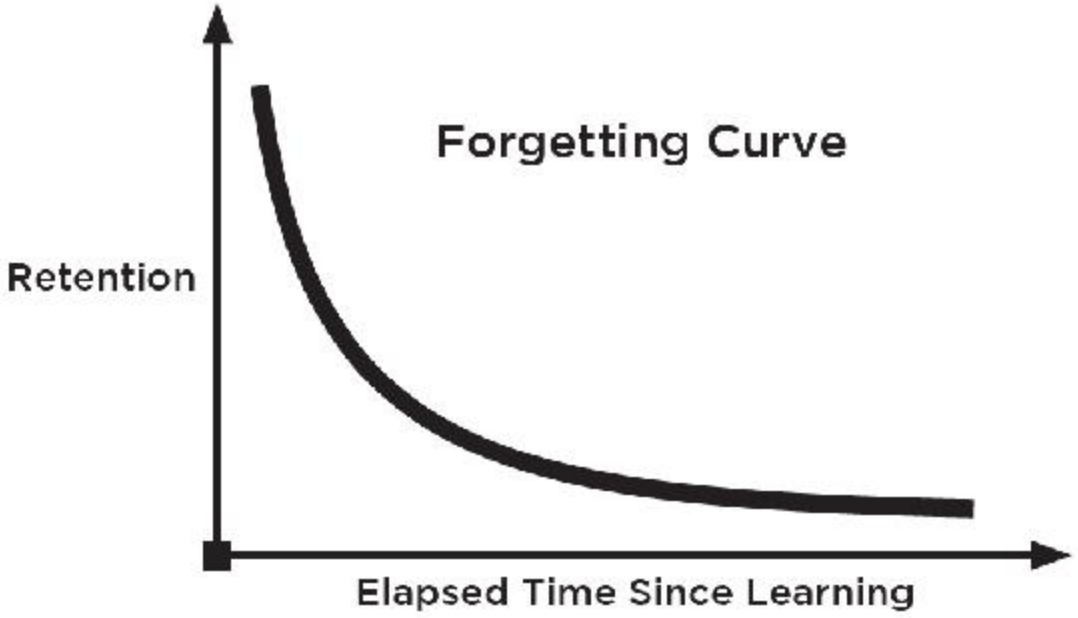
Your time is one of your greatest assets. It's the one thing you can't get back.

As your brain coach, I want you to get the greatest results and return on your attention, so here are some recommendations on how to get the most out of this book. You can apply this advice toward practically anything you want to learn and read.

Let's start with a question: Have you ever read something only to forget it the next day?

You are not alone. Psychologists refer to this as the "forgetting curve." It is the mathematical formula that describes the rate at which information is forgotten after it is initially learned. Research suggests humans forget approximately 50 percent of what they learn within an hour, and an average of 70 percent within 24 hours.[1]

Below are a handful of recommendations that will help you stay ahead of the curve. Later, I will share advanced strategies to accelerate your learning and retention in the sections on study, speed-reading, and memory improvement.



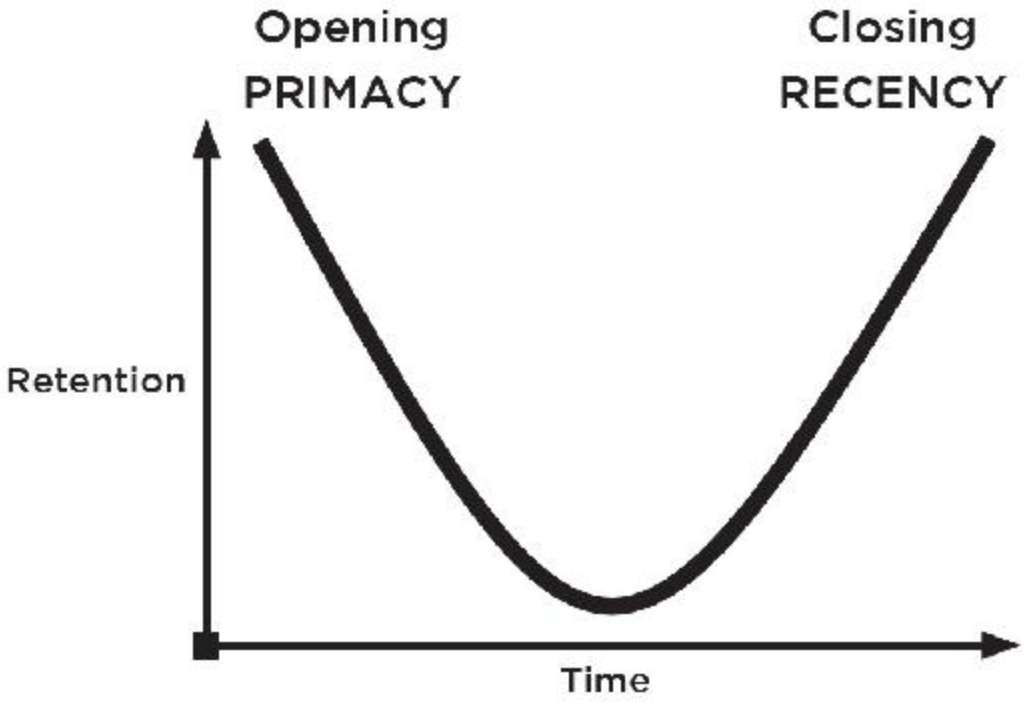

Research suggests that our natural ability to concentrate wanes between 10 to 40 minutes. If we spend any longer on a given task, we get diminishing returns on our investment of time because our attention starts to wander. For that reason, I suggest you use the Pomodoro technique, a productivity method developed by Francesco Cirillo based on the idea that the optimal time for a task is 25 minutes, followed by a 5-minute break.[2] Each 25-minute chunk is called a "Pomodoro." As you read this book, I suggest that you read for one Pomodoro and then take a 5-minute brain break before continuing.

When it comes to learning, the Pomodoro technique works for reasons related to memory, specifically the effect of primacy and recency.

The effect of primacy is that you're more likely to remember what you learn in the beginning of a learning session, a class, a presentation, or even a social interaction. If you go to a party, you might meet 30 strangers. You're most likely to remember the first few people that you meet (unless you've been trained to remember names with my method, which I'll teach you later in this book).

The effect of recency is that you're also likely to remember the last thing you learned (more recent). At the same party, this means that you'll remember the names of the last few people you met.

We've all procrastinated before a test and then, the night before the exam, sat down to "cram" as much as possible without any breaks. Primacy and recency are just two of the (many) reasons cram sessions don't work. But by taking breaks, you create more beginnings and endings, and you retain far more of what you're learning.




If you sit down to read a book over the course of two hours without taking any breaks, you might remember the first 20 minutes of what you read, then maybe you'll experience a dip around the 30-minute mark, and then you're likely to remember the end of what you read. This means the lull in between, with no breaks for assimilation or thinking through what you just read, results in a dead space for learning. So, take this book one Pomodoro at a time so you get the most out of what you read. If you still choose to cram, you'll learn helpful methods in the book to retain the "in-between" information.

Did you know that the very act of reading this book will make you smarter? I realize that's a big claim, but I'm completely convinced that it's true. On one level, it's going to teach you to be smarter through the tools and tactics I share here. But on another level, when you actively read it,

you'll form pictures in your mind, and you'll make connections between what you know and what you're learning. You will think about how this applies to your current life, and you will imagine how you can use the knowledge you're taking in. It promotes neuroplasticity. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Every now and then a man's mind is stretched by a new idea or sensation, and never shrinks back to its former dimensions."[3] When you read any book, you have the opportunity to stretch the range of your mind, and it will never be the same.

***KWIK START***

Set a timer for 25 minutes right now and concentrate on what you're reading in this book for that amount of time. When your alarm goes off, bookmark this book and close it. Then write down what you learned within that 25-minute period.

# USE THE FASTER METHOD

To get the most out of this book, here is a simple method for learning anything quickly. I call it the FASTER Method, and I want you to use this as you read, starting now.

The acronym FASTER stands for: Forget, Act, State, Teach, Enter, Review. Here's the breakdown:

## F is for Forget

The key to laser focus is to remove or forget that which distracts you. There are three things you want to forget (at least temporarily). The first is what you already know. When learning something new, we tend to assume we understand more than we do about that subject. What we think we know about the topic can stand in the way of our ability to absorb new information. One of the reasons children learn rapidly is because they are empty vessels; they know they don't know. Some people who claim to have twenty years of experience have one year of experience that they've repeated twenty times. To learn beyond your present sense of restraints, I

want you to temporarily suspend what you already know or think you know about the topic and approach it with what Zen philosophy calls “a beginner’s mind.” Remember that your mind is like a parachute—it only works when it’s open.

The second thing is to forget what’s not urgent or important. Contrary to popular belief, your brain doesn’t multitask (more on this later). If you’re not fully present, it will be difficult for you to learn when your focus is split.

***KWIK START***

As you are reading this book, when your mind inevitably wanders into something else—and that something else is important but not urgent—don’t try to not think of it. What you resist persists. Instead, keep a notebook close by to capture that thought or idea by writing it down. You can thus release it temporarily, to be addressed after the task at hand is complete.

And finally, forget about your limitations. These are the preconceived notions you believe about yourself, such as that your memory isn’t good or that you’re a slow learner. Suspend (at least temporarily) what you believe is possible. I know this may sound difficult but keep an open mind to what you can do. After all, since you are reading this book, some part of you deep down must believe there’s more to life than what you’ve already demonstrated. Do your best to keep your self-talk positive. Remember this: If you fight for your limitations, you get to keep them. Your capabilities aren’t fixed, and it’s possible to learn anything.

## A is for Act

Traditional education has trained many people that learning is a passive experience. You sit quietly in class, you don’t talk to your neighbor, and you consume the information. But learning is *not* a spectator sport. The human brain does not learn as much by consumption as it does by creation. Knowing that, I want you to ask yourself how you can become more active in your learning. Take notes. Do all the Kwik Start exercises. Download the

Kwik Brain app to test and train your limitless abilities. Go to the resource page at www.LimitlessBook.com/resources for additional free tools. I recommend you highlight key ideas, but don't become one of those highlight junkies who make every page glow in the dark. If you make everything important, then nothing becomes important. The more active you are, the better, faster, and more you will learn.

***KWIK START***

What is *one* thing you will do to make reading this book a more active experience? Write it down.

## S is for State

All learning is state-dependent. Your state is a current snapshot of your emotions. It is highly influenced by your thoughts (psychology) and the physical condition of your body (physiology). Your feelings or lack thereof about a subject in a specific situation affect the learning process and ultimately the results. In fact, when you tie a feeling to information, the information becomes more memorable. To prove this, I'm guessing there's a song, fragrance, or food that can take you back to your childhood. Information times emotion helps create long-term memories. The opposite is also true. What was the predominant emotional state you felt back in school? When I ask audiences this question, most people in the room shout out "boredom!" In all likelihood, you can relate to this.

If your emotional energy at school was low, it's no wonder you forgot the periodic table. But, when you take control of your state of mind and body, you can shift your experience of learning from boredom to excitement, curiosity, and even fun. To achieve this, you might try shifting the way your body moves in a learning environment or piquing different moods before you sit down to learn. Change your posture or the depth of your breathing. Sit or stand the way you would if you were totally energized and excited for what was coming. Get excited about how you will benefit from what you are about to learn and what you will do with your new knowledge. Remember, all learning is state-dependent. Consciously choose states of joy, fascination, and curiosity.

***KWIK START***

How motivated, energized, and focused are you at this moment? Rate your current state on a scale of 1 to 10. What is *one* thing you will do right now to increase that number?

## T is for Teach

If you want to cut your learning curve dramatically, learn with the intention of teaching the information to someone else. Think about it: If you know you have to give a presentation on what you learn, you will approach how you learn the topic with the intention of mastering it well enough to explain it to someone else. You will pay closer attention. Your notes might be more detailed. And you might even ask better questions. When you teach something, you get to learn it twice: once on your own, and then again through educating another person.

Learning isn't always solo; it can be social. You may enjoy this book more if you invite someone else to learn with you. Buy a copy for a friend, or, even better, start a Limitless Book Club that meets weekly so you can discuss the ideas and concepts in this book. You'll enjoy learning more when you're making memories with a friend or group of friends. Working with someone else will not only help you stay accountable, but it will give you someone to practice this method with.

***KWIK START***

Find a learning buddy to read this book with and hold each other accountable. Write down the name of that person (or persons).

## E is for Enter

What is the simplest and most powerful personal performance tool? Your calendar. We enter important things on our schedule: work meetings, parent-teacher gatherings, dentist appointments, taking Fluffy to the vet, and so on. Do you know what a lot of people don't schedule? Their

personal growth and development. If it's not on your calendar, there's a good chance it's not getting done. It's too easy for the day to slip by with you "forgetting" to work out your body and brain.

***KWIK START***

Take out your calendar and enter your Limitless readings for the next seven days. Label these LIMITLESS ME, GENIUS TIME, BRAIN TRAINING, CONVERSATIONS WITH JIM, or anything else provocative enough to guarantee that you'll keep this date on your calendar.

### R is for Review

One of the best ways to reduce the effects of the forgetting curve is to actively recall what you learned with spaced repetition. You are better able to retain information by reviewing in multiple spread-out sessions. Going over the material at intervals increases our brain's ability to remember it. To leverage this principle, before you begin your reading session take a moment, if only a few minutes, to actively retrieve what you learned the session before. Your brain will give greater value to the reviewed material and prime your mind for what's to come.

***KWIK START***

Before each reading, take a few minutes to talk about or write what you remember from the previous reading.

## CHOOSE WISELY

The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre noted that, "Life is C between B and D," meaning that the life we live is the choices we make between the "B" of birth and the "D" of death. The profound simplicity of that statement is particularly relevant to the journey we're engaged with here. Being

limitless is a choice, and that choice is entirely yours, regardless of your circumstances. You can choose to give up this power, but why would you when you know that you can truly live a life without barriers? But choosing is an active thing, and the time to make this choice is right now.

"This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill—the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill—you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Remember: all I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more."



—MORPHEUS

So, I want you to resolve and commit. Most people are sincerely interested in doing something that they know they *should* do. But they don't do it, because they consider it a preference not a promise. There's tremendous power in making a real resolution. I want you to write down your commitment to complete this book. When we write something down, we're more likely to do what we promise.

Below, I've included a commitment page for you. See eBook Supplemental Resources for a PDF download. If you want extra points, take a photo of your signed promise, then post it on social media. This public resolution will help you stay accountable. Tag me @JimKwik #LimitlessBook so we can cheer you on!

I, _____, commit to reading this book in 10- to 25-minute increments until it is finished.

I commit to focusing by forgetting my prior understanding, distractions, and limiting beliefs of what is possible.

I commit to being active in the process. I will do all the Kwik Start exercises, take notes, highlight, and practice asking myself relevant questions as I read.

I commit to manage my state of being as I read, checking in regularly with my energy levels and being proactive in adjusting my motivation as needed.

I commit to teaching what I learn to others, so we may all benefit.

I commit to entering my reading time in my calendar, because if it's in my schedule I will do it.

I commit to review what I have already learned so I can remember it better before moving on to something new.

And finally, I commit that even if I "mess up" with any of the above, I won't beat myself up. I'll get back at it and do my best.

Yes! I am ready to be LIMITLESS!

Signed,

_____Date: _____

## THE QUESTIONS ARE THE ANSWER

Have you ever read a page in a book, arrived at the end, and could not recall what you just read? You may even reread it, only to forget it again. I don't

want you to experience this while you are reading this book, so why do you think it happens? The answer is, you're not asking the right questions. Questions, in fact, are the answer.

Every second, your senses gather up to 11 million bits of information from the world around you. Obviously, if you tried to interpret and decipher all of them at once, you'd be immediately overwhelmed. That's why the brain is primarily a deletion device; it's designed to keep information out. The conscious mind typically processes only 50 bits per second.

What makes it through the filter is determined by the part of the brain called the reticular activating system, or RAS for short. The RAS is responsible for a number of functions, including sleep and behavior modification. It also acts as the gatekeeper of information through a process called habituation, which allows the brain to ignore meaningless and repetitive stimuli and remain sensitive to other inputs.

One of the ways to guide the RAS are the questions we ask ourselves. These tell that part of our brain what is important to us.

Let's take my younger sister's birthday as an example. Years ago, my sister kept sending me postcards, pictures, and e-mails of pug dogs. You know, the ones with the mushy faces and the bulgy eyes. They're very docile; you can dress them up as ballerinas and they won't care. Of course, I wondered why she was sending me photos of pugs—and then I remembered her birthday was coming up, and it became evident she was leaving clues because she wanted one.

"The one real object of education is to leave a person in the condition of continually asking questions."



—BISHOP MANDELL CREIGHTON

Later that day, I was checking out at the health food store, and I looked over at the other checkout line. To my surprise, I saw a woman carrying her pug over her shoulder. *Wow, I haven't seen one of one of those in a long time—what are the chances of that?* I thought. The next day I went running in my neighborhood, and there was someone walking six pugs.

The question is, where did the pugs come from? Did they just magically appear? Of course not. They were always there. But in the flood of stimuli, I had never paid attention to them before. Once pugs broke through my awareness, I started seeing them all over the place. Have you had an experience like this? Maybe it was a specific kind of car or outfit that "magically" began appearing everywhere.

In an interview with media personality Jeannie Mai, we compared this effect to how your favorite social media platform starts showing you more posts based on past expressed interest. The site you're on knows this because of what you clicked, liked, or watched before. Your RAS is like that site's algorithm. It shows you more of what you express interest in, and it hides the things you don't engage in.

So often the answers we want are there, but we're not asking the right questions to shine a spotlight on them. Instead, we're asking useless questions or worse, questions that are disempowering. Why am I not smart enough? Why am I not good enough? Why can't I lose weight? Why can't I find the person I'm meant to be with? We ask such negative questions, and then those questions give us evidence—or pugs—as answers. The human mind is always generalizing in order to make sense of the world. Here, there, and everywhere, we can find evidence to confirm our beliefs.

Thinking is a process of reasoning through something, during which we ask and answer questions. You may be asking, is that true? See, you had to ask a question. While we have tens of thousands of thoughts a day, we have one, maybe two dominant questions we ask more than others. As you can imagine, these questions direct our focus, which directs how we feel, and how we consequently spend our lives. As a thought experiment, imagine someone whose most frequent question is, "How do I get people to like me?" You don't know their age, career, or what they look like. But you know more than you probably realize. What do you imagine their personality is like? You don't need to know much to guess that they're a people pleaser, they're indirect in expressing their needs, and they're not authentic about how they feel or think in any given moment. Someone who

is constantly asking themselves how to get people to like them can never truly be their true self because they will always be molding themselves to the preferences of the people around them, even if they're not aware of it. You know all this information, and you only know one question they ask themselves. What do you think is your dominant question?

## YOUR DOMINANT QUESTION

When I felt my brain was broken, I loved to escape into the world of superheroes, comic books, Dungeons and Dragons. The world of fantasy helped me forget my pain. I decided that the superpower that would be best for me was invisibility, and my dominant question became, "How do I stay invisible?" Instead of being seen, I was always watching everyone else, wondering what everyone's life was like. I wondered why this person was so popular, and that person was so happy, or what made another person so smart. I was suffering all the time, so as I watched people and learned from the world around me, my dominant question changed to, "How do I make this better?" I wanted to solve this riddle: "How does my mind work so I can work my mind?" The more and more I asked these new questions, the more answers I got. This book is the result of two decades of asking empowering questions.

"He who
asks questions
cannot avoid
the answers."



—CAMEROON PROVERB

I first met Will Smith at Quincy Jones's 80th birthday party. After hearing about my traumatic brain injury, he invited me to be his guest at the premiere of the film *Concussion*, a movie about the concerns of football-related head trauma. (I'll talk about brain protection in an upcoming chapter.) Eventually, Will booked me to come to Toronto to spend time with him for a week on set. He was shooting a superhero film, so you can imagine that I was in my glory.

What was interesting to me was the cast and crew were working each night, from 6 P.M. to 6 A.M., outside in the dead of winter. Not all Hollywood is glitz and glam; there's a lot of hurrying up just to wait on set. During a break, Will and I discovered a few of his dominant questions, one of which is "How do I make this moment even more magical?" While we were waiting for Will's next scene to shoot, his family and friends were huddled in tents watching the other actors work. At 3 A.M., while I'm sure everyone was cold and tired, we got to see his dominant question in action. He was bringing everyone hot cocoa, cracking jokes to make us smile, and actively playing host when he could have been resting. He was indeed making the moment even more magical. The result of this question directed his focus and his behavior, and completely changed the experience for everyone.

***KWIK START***

What is one dominant question you ask yourself? Write it down.

## PREPARE YOUR MIND

Questions direct your focus, so they play into everything in life—even reading comprehension. Because people typically don't ask enough questions when they read, they compromise their focus, understanding, and retention. If you prep your mind with the right kinds of questions before you read, you'll see answers (pug dogs) everywhere. For that reason, I place specific key questions throughout the book.

To start you off, here are the three dominant questions to ask on our journey together. They will help you to take action on what you learn and turn the knowledge into power.

- How can I use this?
- Why must I use this?
- When will I use this?

***KWIK START***

These are your three magic questions: How can I use this? Why must I use this? When will I use this? They will help you integrate the knowledge from this book into your head, heart, and hands. Ingrain them. Write these questions down where you can see them—on your desk or in your phone.

Instead of passively reading, consider these questions as you take in the knowledge in this book. Remember, questions are the answer. At the beginning of every chapter for the rest of the book, you will find a series of questions that are designed to prime your focus as you read. Study the questions before you read each chapter, and you'll be better prepared to understand and remember what you learn.

Along with the questions, do the "Kwik Start" exercises seeded in strategic places throughout the book. They are specific activities designed to train you to take immediate action in your learning and life. Most of these can be done in one or two minutes. Remember the power of neuroplasticity: Every time you answer a question and do a new activity, you rewire your brain. I also conclude each chapter with exercises to do before you move on to the next section, to really set these lessons into practice.

"Everybody is a genius.

But if you judge

a fish by its ability

to climb a tree,

it will live its whole life

believing that

it is stupid."

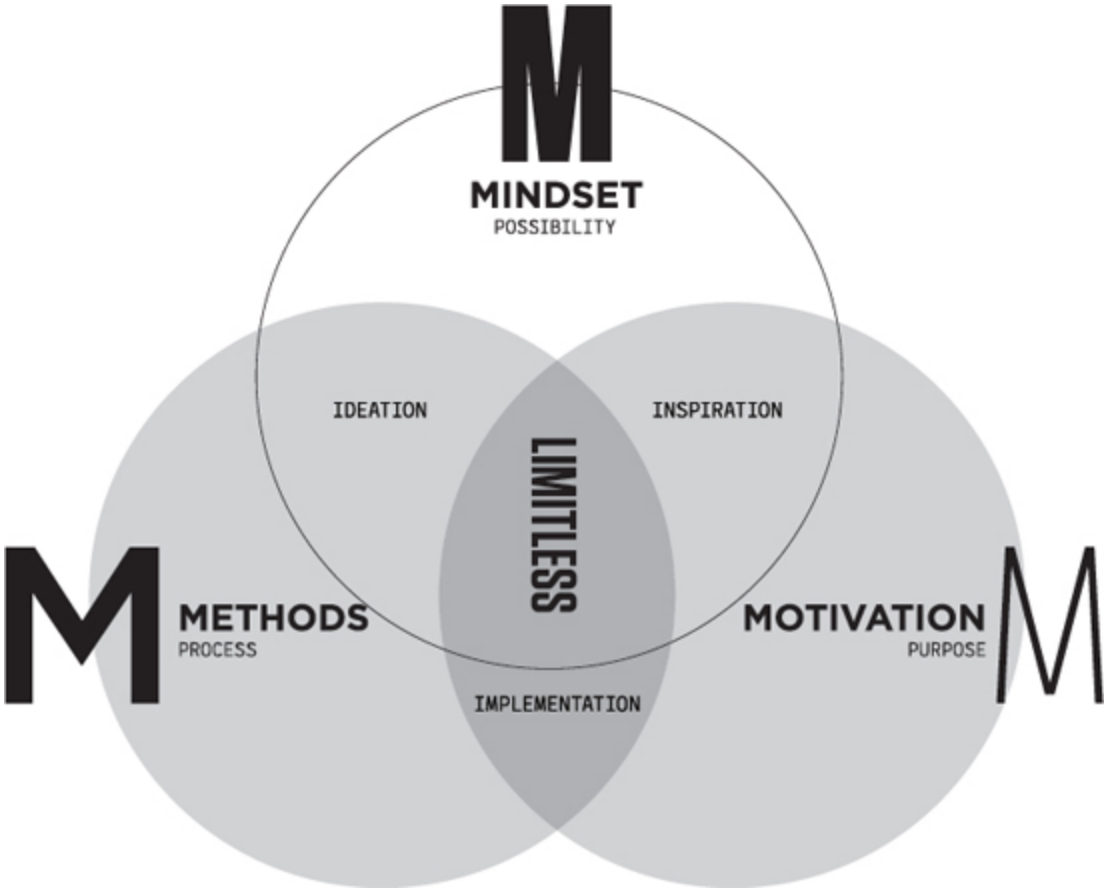


—ALBERT EINSTEIN

## PART II

# LIMITLESS MINDSET

## THE WHAT




**mindset**

mind·set *(noun)*

The deeply held beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions we create about who we are, how the world works, what we are capable of and deserve, and what is possible.

The first element of the three-part Limitless Model is Mindset, which is the mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations. Mindset is made up of beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes we hold about ourselves and the world around us. All behavior is driven by belief, so before we address how to learn, we must first address the underlying beliefs we hold about what is possible.

We're not born with pre-installed mindsets about what we're capable of achieving—we learn these fixed and limited ways of thinking from the people in our lives and the culture we experience growing up.

Think of a young elephant tied to a stake in the ground. When it's a baby, the elephant isn't strong enough to pull the stake up, so it eventually stops trying because it learns the effort is futile. As the elephant grows, it gains more than enough power and strength to pull out the stake, but it remains tied up by something as inconsequential as a rope and a flimsy piece of metal because of what it learned as a baby. In psychology, it's called learned helplessness.

Most of us behave like that elephant. At some point, we had an experience that gave us an impression of what we're capable of, and our belief about our potential has been set ever since. But just as helplessness is learned, it's just as possible to learn to be limitless. In this section, you're going to learn about the seven lies we've been taught about our potential and how to replace them with new beliefs.

I use the term LIE intentionally. In this case, LIE is an acronym for Limited Idea Entertained. If you are like the vast majority of people out there, you are entertaining ideas about yourself that define you as something less than what you truly have the potential to achieve. You're giving these ideas energy and allowing them to take residence in your mind, but they're really nothing but BS (in this case, an abbreviation for Belief Systems). Over the coming chapters, you will discover where these lies come from, how they imprison you, and what you can do about it. And keep asking yourself this question: How many of my perceived constraints are nothing more than LIEs and BS? I think you're going to be stunned with the answers, and that these answers are going to be liberating.

A quick story before we get going. One of the most cherished friendships of my life was the one I shared with Stan Lee. As you know, Stan's Marvel creations helped me through some of the biggest challenges of my life when

I was younger, and they continue to be a nonstop source of inspiration to this day. My conversations with Stan were always engaging and very often illuminating.

I remember one such conversation when we were in a car together on our way to a dinner. Stan looked resplendent in his suit with a bold Spiderman tie, and I was inspired to ask him something I'd always wanted to ask.

"Stan, you've created so many great characters over the years, like the Avengers and X-Men," I said. "Who's your favorite character?"

He didn't even hesitate a second.

"Iron Man," he said. "And who's yours?"

I pointed to his tie. "That would be Spiderman."

Stan nodded and said, "With great power comes great responsibility."

"That's so true, Stan. And the opposite is also true: with great responsibility comes great power."

He seemed to like that, which tickled me to no end. But while I'd never phrased it that way before, I realized that I was voicing one of the key tenets of the limitless mindset. When we take responsibility for something, we are imbued with great power to make things better.

That's what a limitless mindset is all about. Our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, but we must be accountable for who we become. It's about understanding that we are responsible for our assumptions and attitudes. And when you accept that all of your potential is entirely within your control, then the power of that potential grows dramatically.

So, superhero, let's get started on unlimiting your mindset. As Stan would say, "Excelsior!"

"It ain't what you
don't know that
gets you into trouble.
It's what you
know for sure
that just ain't so."



—MARK TWAIN

# 5

# THE SPELL OF BELIEF SYSTEMS

**Why do your beliefs have such an effect on your life?**

**Why do limiting beliefs keep you from your goals?**

**How do you reject limiting beliefs?**

Grab some imaginary popcorn, because we're going to take a quick side trip to the movies. The scene goes like this:

A bridge is about to collapse because a supervillain has weakened the supports to the point where the entire thing is going to go crumbling into the river. As the bridge creaks and teeters, our superhero learns about the crisis and races to the scene. She's the only person with the strength to avert catastrophe and save hundreds of lives.

Our superhero is less than 10 seconds from the bridge now. But as she gets closer, a voice in her head reminds her of the time she face-planted while doing a somersault in elementary school. A couple of seconds later, she recalls her father telling her that it would be best if she set her sights low for her future. With the bridge in sight, another vision emerges in front of her: her former best friend ridiculing her for her delusions of grandeur.

Rubble from the bridge topples into the water. The creaking gets louder. The screams of dozens and dozens fill the air.

And our superhero, overwhelmed with doubt, sits down by the side of the road, covers her face with her hands, and drowns in self-pity.

Wait . . . what?

You've never seen that scene in a superhero movie, right? There are some reasons for that. One is that it would be a terrible story. Another is that, regardless of the darkness in their pasts or the moral conflicts they might be facing, superheroes don't become true superheroes by giving in to limiting beliefs. Superman doesn't think that, maybe on a good day, he might be able to leap a tall building or, maybe, you know, a couple of stories at least. Tony Stark doesn't think, "This Iron Man suit is probably going to fail me at the worst possible time because I'm inherently a screw-up." Captain Marvel doesn't break through our atmosphere and suddenly start thinking, "I'm not sure I have the emotional capacity to fly solo through space." They have superpowers, and any sense of restriction be damned.

And you know what? You have superpowers too. How do you realize them? You begin with your mindset.

## FINDING MY ROGER BANNISTER

When I was a kid, maybe 9 or 10 years old, we had a big family reunion. There were a couple dozen of us around a huge table in a big, busy restaurant. It was a Saturday night, so the place was packed, with the waitstaff ping-ponging from table to table as quickly as they could.

A few minutes after we all gathered, our waitress came over to take our order. As you can imagine, this was a lengthy process. About halfway through, the waitress came around to ask me what I wanted to eat and drink. It was then that I realized that she hadn't been writing down anything my relatives had ordered. I found this extremely curious. There was something like 25 of us, and I'd seen her serving other customers, so I knew we weren't her only table. How was she possibly going to remember everything we'd ordered? I told her what I wanted and then watched her carefully as she made her way around the rest of the table.

I did not have a high level of confidence that my meal was going to remotely resemble what I'd requested. Even at that age, I had a healthy amount of skepticism. Not because I was a negative person or because I didn't have faith in people, but rather that I needed to *see* anything out of the ordinary before I *believed* it was possible. In this case, I figured that, at best, the waitress would get most of our orders correct, but she'd wind up

putting them down in the wrong places, and we'd find ourselves trading plates all across the table.

Well, first our drinks came, and everyone got exactly what they wanted, even the cousin who wanted no ice in her Coke and another who'd requested that her drink come with a twist of lemon, a twist of lime, and two cherries. *Okay*, I thought, *that was pretty good. But there's a lot more to come*. A few minutes later, the salads came out, and again everything was perfect. The people who wanted their dressing on the side got it that way, the people who wanted their dressing tossed with their salads got that, and everyone got the dressing they'd asked to get. My skepticism was being tested. And then the main courses were delivered. Not one mistake—and there were some crazy special requests. Everything was cooked the way we wanted, and all of the side dishes were the right ones.

I dove into my meal at that point, but I couldn't stop thinking about what the waitress had accomplished. At this age, I'd only just begun to read competently, and my brain injury had caused me all kinds of learning challenges. And yet here was someone who had shown me that our brains are capable of far more than I would have imagined.

That waitress was my Roger Bannister. Bannister was a track star in the 1950s. In the early years of Bannister's career, it was widely assumed that it was physically impossible for an athlete to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. The feeling was that our bodies would break down from the effort before the time could be achieved. Then, on May 6, 1954, Bannister ran a mile in 3 minutes and 59.4 seconds, proving that the 4-minute barrier was indeed breakable. What is most interesting to me is that less than two months later someone broke Bannister's record, and then that record was broken, and then that one. The times have been dropping ever since.

What Bannister did was show that this barrier wasn't in fact a barrier at all. That was what this waitress showed me. Through her, I saw that what I'd perceived my brain's capacity to be was so much less than what it really was. As you know, I continued to struggle with learning for many years, but from the moment of that dinner I had a model for what was possible.

The waitress in this way was limitless. She demonstrated something in front of me that I would never in a million years have thought was possible. I never got to know her, but I'm forever grateful because what she did for me personally was to permanently change my perceptions of my own restrictions. She altered my mindset. It was impossible for me to buy into

the notion that I could expect to accomplish only a modest amount with my brain when I knew that others could achieve so much more. I just needed to find a method.

I'm going to share much of that method with you in this book. At its core is one fundamental concept: unlimiting. The key to making yourself limitless is unlearning false assumptions. So often, we don't accomplish something because we've convinced ourselves that we can't do it. Let's go back to Roger Bannister for a moment. Every day before May 6, 1954, people were absolutely certain that a sub-four-minute mile was beyond the range of human capabilities. Forty-six days after Bannister did it, someone else beat his time, and more than 1,400 racers have followed them. Running a mile in less than four minutes is still an extraordinary feat—but it is not an impossible feat. Once that "barrier" was broken, many achieved it.

So, how do you face down limiting beliefs?

## WHAT LIMITING BELIEFS DO TO US

Limiting beliefs are often revealed in our self-talk, that inner conversation that focuses on what you're convinced you *can't* do rather than what you already excel at and what you're going to continue to achieve today and into the future. How often do you stop yourself from attempting to do something or from pursuing a dream because that voice convinces you that it is beyond your reach? If this sounds like you, you are very far from alone, but you're also not doing yourself any favors.

"We come into this world not knowing if life is hard or easy, if money is scarce or abundant, if we're important or unimportant. We look at two people who know everything: our parents,"[1] said belief change expert Shelly Lefkoe in our podcast interview. Parents are our first teachers, and although they probably meant us no harm, we still come away from our childhoods with the limiting beliefs they unconsciously instilled in us.

Limiting beliefs can stop you in your tracks even when you're doing something at which you normally excel. Have you ever had the experience of being in a pressure situation where you need to do something that typically comes easily to you—writing a memo or doing a quick calculation, for example—but the intensity causes you to doubt yourself so much that you fail at this task? That's a limiting belief setting you back. If

you could just get out of your head, you'd have no trouble getting the job done, but your inner voice confounds you.

Now, take that situation and extend it to an entire segment of your life. Your career aspirations, perhaps, or your ability to make friends. If your limiting beliefs are in control, you could find yourself mired in underachievement, either wondering why you never really get ahead or convinced that you don't deserve it.

Alexis, who cofounded Kwik Learning with me, struggled with learning as a child much like I did, but for very different reasons. She was born in South Korea to entrepreneurial parents who struggled in business. They didn't have a lot of money, but always worked hard to make ends meet. While she had a roof over her head, her family of four lived in a one-room basement in Korea. Their second business had just failed when they received a letter from the United States saying their visa application had been approved—they had filed seven years earlier. On the verge of desperation, her family thought this was a new chance, so they borrowed the equivalent of $2,000 and left for America.

Alexis didn't know a word of English when she arrived. It was total culture shock—she didn't know what was being said around her, and the cultural norms were entirely different. Her parents didn't speak English either, so they were all struggling to understand their new world.

Alexis enrolled in school near her new home. She was a shy and introverted student, and, because she didn't know the language, she often sat alone at the lunch table or ate in a bathroom stall just to avoid feeling like an outcast.

It took Alexis six years to be able to truly understand English, and both the kids and the teachers in her school didn't understand why she struggled for so long. After a couple of years, classmates started to criticize her for being a slow learner. "What's wrong with you?" "Are you stupid? "You're weird," were phrases she heard frequently as a child.

Her difficulties in school even extended to physical education, the one area where she ostensibly didn't need to use many words. She remembers sitting on the bleachers repeatedly copying out the words, "I will bring my gym clothes to class." But she had no idea what she was writing, and no one managed to communicate to her that she needed to bring a change of clothing.

By the time she was in her early twenties, Alexis had a hard time reading a book from front to back. She battled with her internal voices whenever she attempted to learn. One overarching voice constantly criticized and doubted her abilities, while another small voice questioned that critic. Something inside her couldn't fully accept the notion that she was "dumb." Her parents worked hard to give her a second chance, and she couldn't let them down. While there were moments where she felt she wasn't good enough to do anything special in her life, there were also moments where she was sure there had to be more to life than merely accepting her circumstances.

If Alexis allowed those external voices to shape her reality, then it would've stopped her in her tracks. She wouldn't have searched for solutions to her problems. Instead, she looked for answers by observing and learning from others. She started wondering what they were doing differently to find success and happiness. She wanted to know if it was sheer luck and genius, or if there was a method behind it. In her quest to learn how to be successful, she ended up in one of my early classes. She wasn't sure what she was getting into, but knew she wanted something different for herself—she needed to feel a sense of hope.

On day one, we covered memory. It was eight hours of intense training, but at the end of the session, Alexis felt refreshed and even excited about what she was learning. "How else can I use my brain?" she wondered. For the first time in her life, she didn't feel slow and she felt excited about learning.

Day two was all about speed reading. She wasn't initially excited about this because of her previous challenges. But when Alexis learned the smart reading habits and went through the speed-reading exercises, a lightbulb turned on. She suddenly saw the potential—and even the fun—of reading. She realized she was not too slow or stupid to understand; she was just never shown how to learn and use the super-computer between her ears. As she experienced the power of learning, the years of negative self-talk and limiting beliefs took a backseat in her mind.

After that class, Alexis read a complete book for the first time and was blown away by how much she understood, how much she remembered, and how much she liked the experience.

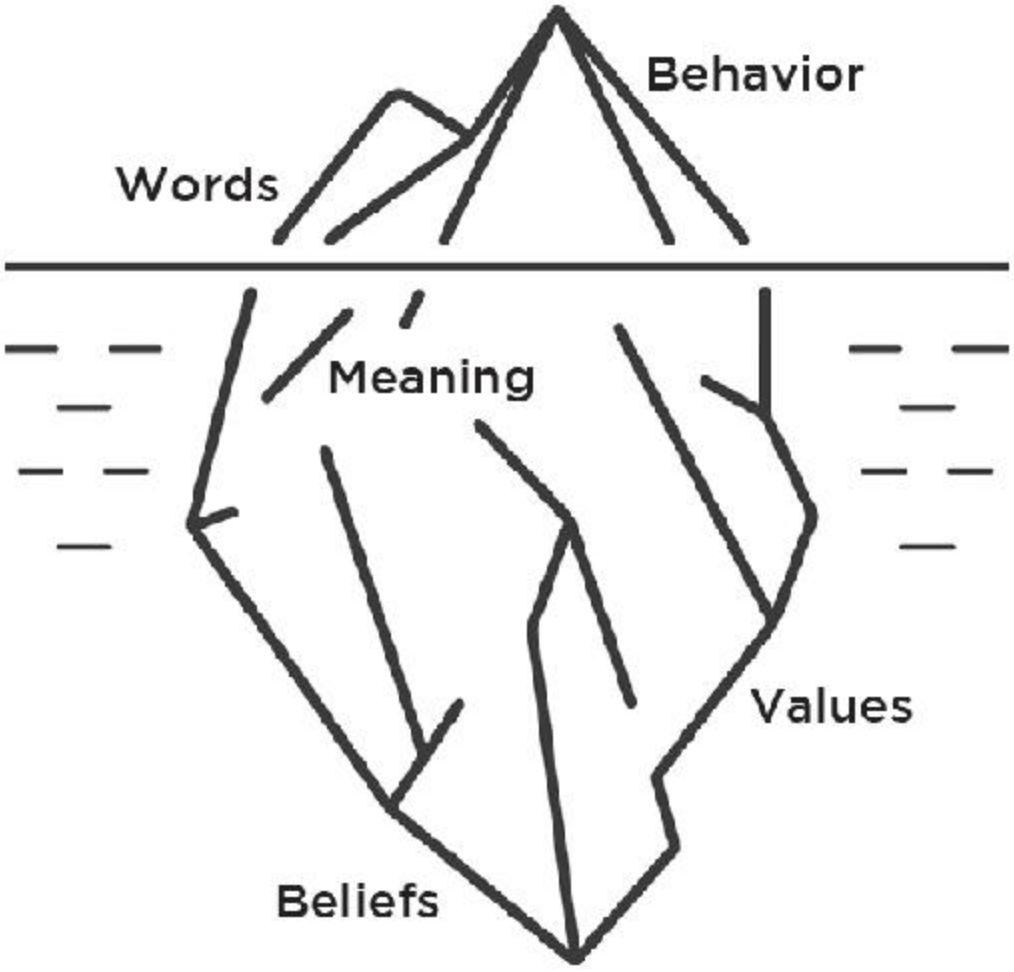
It was a huge turning point in her life. She went from a limited mindset, believing that "things are the way they are," to knowing that she could

change and shape her mind to reach her goals. For the first time in her life, she began to believe in herself and imagine what might be possible.

Today, Alexis doesn't shy away from learning something new. She doesn't feel inadequate if she doesn't know something. She goes out to find answers and applies them. Out of her passion for learning, she also started Kwik Learning Online with me to share the transformation she experienced with others in every country in the world.

In their book *Mequilibrium*, authors Jan Bruce, Dr. Andrew Shatté, and Dr. Adam Perlman call these kinds of beliefs "iceberg beliefs" because of how many of them lie beneath the surface of our subconscious. "Iceberg beliefs are deeply rooted and powerful, and they fuel our emotions," they say in the book. "The more entrenched an iceberg is, the more havoc it wreaks on your life. . . creating your schedule chaos, getting in the way of successfully sticking to a diet, or holding you back from seizing opportunities."

And, perhaps most significantly, they say, "If we get a handle on our icebergs, we gain an *enormous* amount of control over our feelings and our lives. Melt an iceberg and all the downstream events it causes get washed away as well."[2]




Dr. Jennice Vilhauer, director of Emory University's Adult Outpatient Psychotherapy Program in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science in the School of Medicine, implores us to come face-to-face with our inner critic, "the voice in your head that judges you, doubts you, belittles you, and constantly tells you that you are not good enough. It says negative hurtful things to you—things that you would never even dream of saying to anyone else. *I am such an idiot; I am a phony; I never do anything right; I will never succeed.*"

She adds: "The inner critic isn't harmless. It inhibits you, limits you, and stops you from pursuing the life you truly want to live. It robs you of peace of mind and emotional well-being and, if left unchecked long enough, it can even lead to serious mental health problems like depression or anxiety."[3]

Let’s revisit our failed superhero from the beginning of this chapter. She certainly had the motivation to save the day. And she certainly had the methods to save the day. But what she didn’t have was the mindset. Her inner critic convinced her that she wasn’t good enough, so she sat on the sidelines feeling sorry for herself instead of taking care of business. Certainly, one takeaway from this story is that our failed superhero blew it. She flopped at a critical time because she couldn’t get out of her own head.

But there’s another hugely important component to this story: our superhero had everything inside of her to succeed. If only she’d been able to prevail over the beliefs that were holding her back, her extraordinary talents would have shone through.

That’s how important it is to conquer your limiting beliefs.

## WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT YOU WERE A GENIUS?

When you think of geniuses, who are the first people that come to mind? I’m guessing Einstein and Shakespeare are on your shortlist. Others might include Stephen Hawking, Bill Gates, Marie Curie, or Ruth Bader Ginsburg. These names pop into many people’s heads because each of them was extraordinary in the kinds of intelligence we tend to equate with genius. But was LeBron James on your list? How about Beyoncé? Or Oprah? Or you?

It wouldn’t be surprising if you didn’t include the latter names on your list. Most of us tend to equate genius with one particular measurement of intelligence: IQ. People with outsize IQs are geniuses, and people with lesser IQs can be good or even great at something, but they aren’t considered geniuses.

If this sounds like your kind of thinking, you’re far from alone in defining genius far, far too narrowly. I would even take this to the point of suggesting that most people define genius in this way. But there are two problems with that. One is that it prevents you from appreciating the genius a wide variety of people hold. The other is that it might prevent you from identifying the genius in yourself.

There are multiple forms of genius. Various experts differ on the number, but it is commonly agreed that genius expresses itself in one of four

manners. Here's a way of looking at it that has been around for thousands of years:

- **Dynamo genius:** Those who express their genius through creativity and ideas. Shakespeare was a dynamo genius because of his brilliance at inventing stories that told us so much about ourselves. Galileo was a dynamo genius because of the way he could see things that others couldn't see when he looked up at the skies. Dynamo geniuses are those we most commonly think of when we think of geniuses.
- **Blaze genius:** Those whose genius becomes clear through their interaction with others. Oprah Winfrey is a blaze genius because of her extraordinary ability to connect with the hearts, minds, and souls of a wide range of individuals. Malala Yousafzai's blaze genius expresses itself through her ability to make her story relatable to people all around the globe. Blaze geniuses tend to be master communicators.
- **Tempo genius:** Those whose genius expresses itself through their ability to see the big picture and stay the course. Nelson Mandela was a tempo genius because he was capable of seeing the wisdom of his vision even in the face of overwhelming odds. Mother Teresa's tempo genius allowed her to imagine better circumstances for those around her even at the darkest times. Tempo geniuses tend to understand the long view in ways that most of those around them cannot.
- **Steel genius:** Those who are brilliant at sweating the small stuff and doing something with the details that others missed or couldn't envision. Sergey Brin used his genius at seeing the potential of large amounts of data to co-found Google. If you read the book *Moneyball*, then you know that Billy Beane and his staff redefined baseball through their genius at crunching data. Steel geniuses love getting all the information they can get and have a vision for doing something with that information that most others miss.

### *KWIK START*

What would you say is your genius? Write it down.

There's a very good chance that your own genius is a combination of two or more of these. Very few of us are only data people or are only adept at being empathetic. But what's important for you to understand here is that genius extends far beyond your ability to excel at academics or recite the periodic table on command—and that you have genius inside of you.

If you find that last statement surprising, you might want to go back and reread some of the earlier chapters in this book. Making yourself limitless is all about unleashing your innate genius. Maybe you aren't the dynamo of Shakespeare or the blaze of Oprah, but there is some combination of genius inside of you that is either waiting to express itself or waiting to express itself *more*. The key is letting it free.

## IT ISN'T ONLY IN YOUR HEAD

Before I give you some tools to help you shift toward a more positive mindset, let's just talk for a minute about how important positive thinking is. There are clear connections between positive thinking and physical health. In a Johns Hopkins study, Dr. Lisa Yanek found that "positive people from the general population were 13 percent less likely than their negative counterparts to have a heart attack or other coronary event."[4]

Meanwhile, the Mayo Clinic notes that "The positive thinking that usually comes with optimism is a key part of effective stress management. And effective stress management is associated with many health benefits."

They note that these benefits include:

- Increased life span
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Greater resistance to the common cold
- Better psychological and physical well-being
- Better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress[5]

# REFRAMING LIMITING BELIEFS

There's a metaphor I've always found useful when helping people to move away from limiting beliefs. I tell them that the difference between limiting beliefs and a limitless mindset is like the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat. A thermometer has only one function: to react to the environment. It reads the temperature and nothing more. This is similar to how people commonly react to limiting beliefs. They read their sense of restriction, react in a constrained way to that, and conduct their lives in a limited way.

On the other hand, a thermostat gauges the environment and makes the environment react to it. If a thermostat notices that a room is too cold or too hot, it changes the environment to fit the ideal for which it is set. Similarly, if you encounter external or internal attempts to put constraints on you, you can act like a thermostat to reject those limiting beliefs and create an environment that aligns with your most ambitious goals.

So, how do you minimize limiting beliefs and develop a superhero mindset? To me, there are three keys.

## Key 1: Name Your Limiting Beliefs

You've seen some examples here of limiting beliefs, but there are many more where those came from (and we'll go over the seven most prevalent limiting beliefs on learning in a moment). They might have to do with your talents, your character, your relationships, your education, or anything else that leads to internal whispers that you can't be what you want to be. Start paying attention right now to every time you tell yourself that you're incapable, even if you think that this particular thing might not be consequential in your life.

For example, maybe you tell yourself that you're terrible at telling jokes. Perhaps this isn't a big deal to you, because being a good joke-teller isn't a personal aspiration. But you might also be telling yourself that you don't think you're entertaining, or good company, or an enjoyable companion; and that kind of self-talk can ultimately cause you to double-clutch when you're in an important social situation or when you need to speak in front of a group. So, listen carefully every time you find yourself using phrases like "I can't," "I'm not," or "I don't." You're sending messages to yourself that are affecting how you think about your life in general, even if what you're

beating yourself up over is something specific and seemingly not important to how you define yourself.

At the same time, try also to identify the origin of this sort of self-talk. Limiting beliefs often start in childhood. That doesn't automatically mean that your family is their only source. Early social settings can cause limiting beliefs, as can early experiences with education. Some might take hold simply because something didn't go well for you the first few times you tried it as a kid.

Being aware of how you're holding yourself back with your self-talk and spending some time to get to the source of these beliefs is extremely liberating, because once you're aware, you can begin to realize that these aren't *facts* about you, but rather *opinions*. And there's a very good chance that those opinions are wrong.

Once you identify the voices in your head that are focusing on what you can't do, start talking back to them. When you find yourself thinking, "I always screw up this sort of thing," counter with, "Just because I haven't always been good at this in the past doesn't mean that I can't be great at it now. Keep your opinions to yourself."

## Key 2: Get to the Facts

One of the fundamental tyrannies of limiting beliefs is that, in so many cases, they're just plain wrong. Are you *really* terrible at speaking in public? Are you *really* bad at leading a group? Are you *really* the least interesting person in the room wherever you are? What's the evidence to support that? How many times have you actually been in these situations, and what have the results been?

"Life has
no limitations,
except the ones
you make."



—LES BROWN

One of the most pernicious things about limiting beliefs is that they play so heavily on our emotions. When you come up against a limiting belief, you're likely to find those beliefs warring—and usually winning—against your rational self. But how much of this self-talk has a basis in reality? Think about your experiences speaking in public (an extraordinarily common fear, by the way). Rather than focusing on how you felt in these instances, consider how things went. Were you booed off the stage? Did people come up to you afterward to laugh at you and tell you how awful you were? Did your boss sit you down the next day to say that you might want to consider a career where you never had to utter a word?

I'm guessing none of these things happened. Instead, it's likely that your audience felt connected to what you were saying. If it was in a professional setting, maybe they were taking notes, and you almost certainly taught them something. Does this mean that your next speech should be at TED? Of course not. But it definitely means that you're likely much better at conveying information to a group than that voice in your head is telling you that you are.

And then there's this question to ask: How much of my perceived poor performance was because my self-talk just wouldn't leave me alone? This is a real issue for many people. They'll be in the middle of doing something in which they lack confidence, and the inner critic will become so distracting that they can't focus on what they are doing . . . and therefore don't do it very well. This is one of the reasons why it's so important to learn to face down and quiet your limiting beliefs. The better you are at this, the better you'll be at keeping down distractions during your biggest growth challenges.

So, when you're examining the facts behind your limiting beliefs, be sure to consider two things: whether there is in reality any evidence to prove that you are truly hampered in this area and whether even that evidence was tainted by the noise in your head.

### Key 3: Create a New Belief

Now that you've given your limiting beliefs a name and now that you've carefully examined the reality of those beliefs, it's time to take the most essential step—to generate a new belief that is both truer than the LIEs

you've been accepting and beneficial to the limitless you that you are creating.

You're going to see this process at work in the next chapter, but let's take it for a spin right now. Let's say that one of your limiting beliefs is that you always come up short at the most important moments in your life. Having identified that as a limiting belief, you've then taken the step of examining the facts. What you realize is that, while you have occasionally succumbed to nervousness in pressure-packed moments, very few of these instances have been disastrous for you and, upon examination, you can think of several times when you "came through in the clutch." In fact, now that you really think about it, you've succeeded way more often than you've faltered.

So, now it's time to create a new belief. In this case, your new belief would be that no one triumphs at the most critical juncture 100 percent of the time, but that you should be proud of yourself for how many times you've performed at your best when the pressure was highest. This new belief completely supplants the old belief, is fully supported by the facts, and gives you a much healthier mindset the next time a critical situation comes along.

I have one more tool for you to use here. I've spoken to many experts over the years, and the conversation often comes back to the same thing: as long as you believe that your inner critic is the voice of the true you, the wisest you, it's always going to guide you. Many of us even use phrases like, "I know myself, and . . ." before announcing a limiting belief.

But if you can create a separate persona for your inner critic—one that is different from the true you—you'll be considerably more successful at quieting it. This can be enormously helpful and you can have fun with it at the same time. Give your inner critic a preposterous name and outrageous physical attributes. Make it cartoonish and unworthy of even a B-grade movie. Mock it for its rigid dedication to negativity. Roll your eyes when it pops into your head. The better you become at distinguishing this voice from the real you, the better you'll be at preventing limiting beliefs from getting in your way.

## THE POSSIBILITIES BECOME LIMITLESS

Now that you know how to conquer your limiting beliefs, you can start to bring your positive mindset to bear on your quest to become limitless. That might sound like an audacious plan, but there's lots of evidence to support the connection between mindset and accomplishment.

One of my podcast guests, James Clear, the *New York Times* best-selling author of *Atomic Habits* who you will meet again later in this book, wrote about a study performed by Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, a positive psychology researcher at the University of North Carolina. He prefaced their conversation by underscoring what negative emotions do to us, using the example of encountering a tiger in the forest. "Researchers have long known that negative emotions program your brain to do a specific action," he noted. "When that tiger crosses your path, for example, you run. The rest of the world doesn't matter. You are focused entirely on the tiger, the fear it creates, and how you can get away from it."[6] The point that Clear is making is that negative emotions drive us to narrow the range of what we are capable of doing. It's all about getting away from the (metaphorical) tiger, and nothing else matters. If we let negative emotions (such as limiting beliefs) control us, we're regularly operating in survival mode and therefore confined to a reduced range of possibilities.

What Dr. Fredrickson discovered is that a positive mindset leads to precisely the opposite result. She created an experiment where participants were divided into five groups and presented with film clips. The first group saw clips that elicited joy. The second saw clips that elicited contentment. The third saw clips that generated fear and the fourth clips that generated anger. The fifth group was the control group.

After they'd seen the clips, the participants were asked to imagine similar situations to what they just saw and how they would react to these situations. They were then asked to fill out a form that had 20 prompts that began with, "I would like to." The people who experienced fear and anger wrote the fewest responses, while those who experienced joy and contentment listed far more than even the control group. "In other words," Clear noted, "when you are experiencing positive emotions like joy, contentment, and love, you will see more possibilities in your life."[7]

What's also essential to note is that the benefits of a positive mindset extend well beyond the experience of a positive emotion. Clear offers this example:

> A child who runs around outside, swinging on branches and playing with friends, develops the ability to move athletically (physical skills), the ability to play with others and communicate with a team (social skills), and the ability to explore and examine the world around them (creative skills). In this way, the positive emotions of play and joy prompt the child to build skills that are useful and valuable in everyday life. . . . The happiness that promoted the exploration and creation of new skills has long since ended, but the skills themselves live on.[8]

Fredrickson refers to this as the "broaden and build" theory because positive emotions *broaden* your sense of possibilities and open your mind, which in turn allows you to *build* new skills and resources that can provide value in other areas of your life.

> The theory, together with the research reviewed here, suggests that positive emotions: (i) broaden people's attention and thinking; (ii) undo lingering negative emotional arousal; (iii) fuel psychological resilience; (iv) build consequential personal resources; (v) trigger upward spirals towards greater well-being in the future; and (vi) seed human flourishing. The theory also carries an important prescriptive message. People should cultivate positive emotions in their own lives and in the lives of those around them, not just because doing so makes them feel good in the moment, but also because doing so transforms people for the better and sets them on paths toward flourishing and healthy longevity.[9]

The new mindset that comes from silencing your inner critic presents you with a world of possibility. When you're surging with positive emotions, you're seeing—and seizing on—opportunities you might never have noticed before. And with a high sense of motivation (and, really, how could you not be motivated by this?) and the right methods, you're well on the road to becoming virtually limitless.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

To learn faster, we must transcend the narrow definition of what we believe is possible for ourselves. In the following pages, you'll learn about the seven learning lies that are the most common limiting beliefs that hold people back. I've seen students and clients cling to these beliefs throughout my decades of teaching people how to learn. These restrictions are the only real barrier you face. After all, people can't learn to read faster if they believe it isn't possible. They can't learn to memorize things more efficiently if they keep telling themselves they have a bad memory. Everything else falls into place once you snap out of the trance of these so-called "limitations." By tackling these lies, you'll be tackling the core blocks that keep you from being limitless. Here are a few things to try before going on to the next chapter.

- Think of a time when you saw someone accomplish something that truly impressed you. Now think about what personal inspiration you can draw from that.
- Reimagine your inner critic. Change the attributes of this voice in your head so you begin to give it less credence.
- Face down one limiting belief right now. What do you regularly tell yourself you *can't* do? Find the evidence that shows you that this belief isn't true.

"There is one grand lie—that we are limited. The only limits we have are the limits we believe."



—WAYNE DYER

# 6

# THE 7 LIES OF LEARNING

**What are the most limiting myths you tell yourself?**

**How can you overcome the debilitating effect of these myths?**

**How can you turn these limiting beliefs into positive ones?**

You're being lied to. Constantly. Sometimes by yourself. We are all subject to an endless stream of misinformation about our constraints to our capabilities, and we receive this information so often that most of us have no other choice than to believe it. The problem is that these messages directly oppose your quest to become limitless. These limited ideas entertained (LIEs) in our mind can stall us or steer us in a direction we don't want. So, let's bring seven to light, examine them for what they are, and replace them with something better.

## LIE NO. 1: INTELLIGENCE IS FIXED

On the surface, it looked like Rae was a pretty positive person—she ran her own business, she had a thriving social network, and she loved being around people with big ideas who could imagine possibilities that most of us wouldn't dream of.

When Rae had a daughter, she realized that perhaps she wasn't as positive as she thought she was. A different kind of mindset started to show up in very subtle ways, as these things do. First it was in the way she reacted to some of the things her little girl did. Rae tended to think that

“that’s just the way she is,” instead of believing that she could have an effect on the way her daughter behaved. When her partner tried to teach their daughter new things, Rae noticed she felt a subtle discomfort, as if she wanted to protect her daughter from disappointment if she wasn’t able to learn what she was being taught. She became aware of the constant thought that her daughter was “too young to learn that.”

One day, her partner looked at her and said, “Do you think she can’t learn, that she’s never going to improve from where she is?” The answer was of course not—she loved her daughter, and the little girl was bright and curious and learning something new every day. The opposite was obviously true . . . and yet, Rae was aware that there was some belief buried deep inside her that whispered, “No, she is the way she is.” Rae was struggling with a fixed mindset about her daughter’s intelligence.

These beliefs are incredibly subtle. Few of us consciously think about our restrictions or the restrictions we believe others have. But it leaks out in places that deeply affect our happiness—in our work, in our home life, and with our children. If we believe that it’s not possible to improve, then in reality it won’t be possible to improve. It’s extremely difficult to accomplish something when you don’t believe it can be done in the first place.

Carol Dweck, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, describes the difference between a fixed and a growth mindset:

> In a fixed mindset, students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that’s that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset, students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don’t necessarily think everyone’s the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it.[1]

Like Rae, most of us don’t think about whether we have a fixed or a growth mindset. Most of us have carried on thinking in the same patterns that our family did, without even knowing it. As subtle as this is, the adoption of one or the other deeply affects the way we approach life. With

the fixed mindset, things are the way they are—we are powerless to change them. With the growth mindset, we have the ability to improve anything.

If Rae thinks, even on a very subtle level, that her daughter can't improve or grow, what does she do instead of teaching her? Probably a number of things—placating, giving time-outs, diverting attention. All of those work to alleviate the stress of the moment, but they don't contribute to her child's growth. In the same way, if as adults we believe that we don't have the capacity to learn, what do we do instead of taking the responsibility to teach ourselves what we want or need to know? We tell ourselves it isn't necessary, we make excuses, we blame other people or circumstances, and then we distract ourselves with things that make us feel good.

The genesis of this limiting belief is likely one that you either don't remember or that came from your early years. And it has a deep effect on the way you view intelligence and your capacity to learn. IQ scores and testing were created in the early 1900s to better assess which students would experience the most difficulty in school. French psychologist Alfred Binet and his student Theodore Simon were some of the first scientists to come up with a test that measured intelligence after they were commissioned to do so for the French government.[2] They were able to devise a test that took into consideration age as it related to competency. They were also lauded for the fact that the test was easily adaptable to other languages and cultures.[3]

More than 100 years later, it's still hotly debated whether these tests have the ability to measure intelligence, which is the ability to acquire and assimilate knowledge and information. Interestingly, Binet himself was not happy with the way his test was used because it didn't measure creativity or emotional intelligence.[4] Furthermore, our cultural understanding of these tests means we give these scores undue weight. We tend to think of IQ scores as a fixed reflection of our intelligence, but this isn't the case. The IQ test actually measures current academic capabilities, not innate intelligence.[5] To this day, IQ tests still don't measure creativity or practical intelligence (which you can think of as "street smarts"), and they certainly don't measure emotional intelligence[6]—all three of which are increasingly more important in the workplace and in life.

The important distinction here is to remember the difference between test scores and your ability to learn. "Those who claim that IQ is fixed for life

are in fact referring to our IQ test scores, which are relatively stable—not to our intelligence levels, which are constantly increasing," says Bryan Roche of the National University of Ireland.[7]

David Shenk furthers this idea in his book, *The Genius in All of Us*. He writes that everyone has the potential for genius, or at the very least, greatness. But the reason we prefer to believe that we're either a genius or we're not, or that we're either talented or not, is because it relieves us from the responsibility of taking control of our own life. "A belief in inborn gifts and limits is much gentler on the psyche: The reason you aren't a great opera singer is because you can't be one. That's simply the way you were wired. Thinking of talent as innate makes our world more manageable, more comfortable. It relieves a person of the burden of expectation."[8]

Your intelligence is not only malleable but dependent on your ability to cultivate a growth mindset. Start looking at your attitude. Listen to the way you talk; a fixed mindset usually shows up in your language. Maybe you say to yourself, "I'm not good at reading." This kind of statement implies that you believe this is a fixed situation and that your skills can't be improved. Instead, try saying something like "This is something I'm not good at *yet*." This shift in language can be applied to anything you want to improve.

Test scores do not determine your future. They don't determine what you're capable of learning and accomplishing. Take your education into your own hands.

**Here's the truth:** It's not how smart you are; it's how you are smart. There are multiple types of intelligence (more on this later). Like so many things, intelligence is a combination of attitudes and actions, and is dependent on context.

**New belief:** Intelligence is fluid.

## LIE NO. 2: WE ONLY USE 10 PERCENT OF OUR BRAINS

We've all heard this myth. Some of us heard it for the first time in a classroom, some of us heard it from a friend. Some of us heard it through the media—maybe a documentary, a TV show, or a movie. This myth is

usually used in the context of highlighting longed-for possibilities: If only we could access the rest of our brains, what could we accomplish?

The story has been traced to a number of different sources, but as so often happens in the shaping of public opinion, it's likely built on by successive events. Some attribute it to author and philosopher William James, who wrote in *The Energies of Men* that "We are making use of only a small part of our possible mental and physical resources."[9] It could have originated with the work of Pierre Flourens, a French physicist famous for his discoveries in the late 1800s about how the brain and the nervous system work and work together.

The myth could also be related to the work of Dr. Karl Lashley in the 1920s; when Lashley removed parts of rats' cerebral cortex, an area responsible for higher order cognitive processing, he found the rats could still relearn some tasks. This led him to hypothesize —incorrectly—that whole parts of the brain were not necessarily being used.[10] Some blame the earliest neuroimages from PET and fMRI scans, which showed bright blotches on a screen with simplified explanations like "This is what your brain does when you pick something up." These images typically showed just one portion of the brain lighting up, leading the layperson to conclude that we only use a small portion of our brains at one time.[11]

This assumption has also been perpetuated in countless ads and movies over the last hundred years. The adaption of the book *The Dark Fields*, which was produced as *Limitless* in 2011, says we use 20 percent of our brain function; the 2014 movie *Lucy* claimed we use 10 percent at any given time. In 2017, an episode of *Black Mirror*, a show known for its research and well-thought-through use of facts and statistics, touted the myth, saying, "even on a good day, we only use 40 percent of our brain capacity." All of these storylines were focused on the idea of unlocking our greatest, albeit hidden, potential.

Needless to say, this myth is pervasive, and yet it's not true.

In a succinct NPR segment, the host plays a clip of Morgan Freeman posing, in his dramatic bass voice, the what-if scenario upon which *Lucy* is based: "What if there was a way of accessing 100 percent of our brain? What might we be capable of?"

Neuroscientist David Eagleman gives a pointed response: "We would be capable of exactly what we're doing now, which is to say, we do use a

hundred percent of our brain."[12]

Countless evidence backs this up—too much of it to include it all here—but Barry Beyerstein, a professor of psychology at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, described some of the major scientific discoveries that refute this myth, which I've paraphrased here:[13]

- Studies of damaged brains show that there is no single area of the brain that can sustain damage without a loss of ability, contrary to earlier theories. Brain scans have shown that all brain areas are active, no matter what the activity. Even while we sleep, all parts of our brains show activity.
- Our brains are energy-hogs. The brain takes up only 2 percent of space by weight, and yet accounts for 20 percent of energy consumption, more than any other organ. We wouldn't need such an incredible amount of energy for an organ that functioned at 40 percent or less.
- Scientists have also determined that the brain's regions have distinct functions that work together. After extensively mapping the brain over decades, they've concluded that there are no functionless areas of the brain.
- Finally, as we've learned, the brain uses a process called synaptic pruning. If we didn't use a large portion of our brains, we would expect to see large areas of degeneration (we don't—unless brain diseases are present).[14]

To sum up, this myth just isn't true. In an interview with *Scientific American*, neurologist Barry Gordon from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, said that the idea is "so wrong it is almost laughable."[15]

**Here's the truth:** What I want you to take from this is that you have all the power of your brain available to you now. The utopia that each of these movies and TV shows depicts is already possible for you. While we use all of our brain, some people use their brain better than others. Just as most people use 100 percent of their body, there are some bodies that are faster, stronger, more flexible, and more energized than others. The key is to learn how to use your brain as efficiently and effectively as you possibly can—and by the end of this book, you'll have the tools to do so.

**New belief:** I am learning to use my whole brain in the best way possible.

## LIE NO. 3: MISTAKES ARE FAILURES

When we hear the name Einstein, we think of brilliance and intellectual feats the likes of which most of us believe we'll never accomplish. The nearly synonymous relationship is well deserved; Einstein did more to further the scientific field in general and physics in particular than any other scientist of our time. His discoveries have made possible some of our most important modern-day technology.

With such an illustrious reputation, it would be easy to assume Einstein rarely made mistakes—but that is not the case. To begin with, his development was described as "slow," and he was considered to be a below-average student.[16] It was apparent from an early age that his way of thinking and learning was different from the rest of the students in his class. He liked working out the more complicated problems in math, for example, but wasn't very good at the "easy" problems.[17]

Later on in his career, Einstein made simple mathematical mistakes that appeared in some of his most important work. His numerous mistakes include seven major gaffes on each version of his theory of relativity, mistakes in clock synchronization related to his experiments, and many mistakes in the math and physics calculations used to determine the viscosity of liquids.[18]

Was Einstein considered a failure because of his mistakes? Hardly. Most importantly he didn't let his mistakes stop him. He kept experimenting and making contributions to his field. He is famously quoted as having said, "A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new." What's more, no one remembers him for his mistakes—we only remember him for his contributions.

So, why do we fear mistakes so much? It could be ingrained—as school children, we were judged on our mistakes, and the number of them on any given test determined whether we passed or failed. If we were called on in class and said the wrong answer, most of us were usually too embarrassed to raise our hands again. Unfortunately, mistakes are not often used as a tool

for learning; they are used as a way of measuring one's capabilities. Make too many mistakes and you fail your test or your class.

We need to change that. Too many of us don't come close to our capacities because we are too afraid of making a mistake. Instead of looking at mistakes as proof of failure, take them as proof that you are trying.

Beth Comstock, former vice chair of General Electric, and her team learned this when the company had to scrap a new line of products in which it had invested. Comstock, author of *Imagine It Forward: Courage, Creativity, and the Power of Change*, often speaks on the ever-growing demand on businesses and the people within them to adapt and change faster.[19] She reflects on how she and her team were able to look at the mistakes they made not as a failure, but as major learning lessons that led to the development of a new line that moved the company forward.[20] Instead of dwelling on the mistakes, they asked themselves what they learned.

**Here's the truth:** Mistakes don't mean failure. Mistakes are a sign that you are trying something new. You might think you have to be perfect, but life is not about comparing yourself to anyone else; it's about measuring yourself compared to who you were yesterday. When you learn from your mistakes, they have the power to turn you into something better than you were before.

Also, remember that you are not your mistakes. Making a mistake doesn't mean anything about you as a person. It's easy to jump to the conclusion that you're inherently worthless, but you make mistakes; mistakes don't make you. Place them under your feet and use them as stepping stones to rise to the next level. It's not how we make mistakes, but how we deal with them that defines us.

**New belief:** There is no such thing as failure. Only failure to learn.

## LIE NO. 4: KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

We've all heard the phrase "knowledge is power," usually as a reason for learning, as if knowledge alone will give us power. You might have also heard this phrase used with the opposite intent: as a reason to withhold information or knowledge from another person, say, in a negotiation.

Although the phrase "knowledge is power" is commonly attributed to Sir Francis Bacon, the first known use of the exact wording was not penned

until Thomas Hobbes, who acted as secretary to Bacon in his younger years, used the phrase *scientia potentia est*, Latin for "knowledge is power," in *Leviathan* in 1651. He then expanded on the idea in *De Corpore* in 1655. Unfortunately, Hobbes's original sentiments have been cut short over the years. In the original, Hobbes says: "The end of knowledge is power; and the use of theorems is for the construction of problems; and, lastly, the scope of all speculation is the *performing of some action, or thing to be done*." [Emphasis added.][21]

Put another way, knowledge is important, but it is "the performing of some action" that is required to make it powerful. This is where we get stuck as a culture. As discussed, we're deluged with information on a daily basis. We have more access to knowledge than we have ever had in the history of humankind, and yet this glut of information makes it more and more difficult to act.

I used to believe this myth. When I was the "boy with the broken brain," I wanted nothing more than to be able to learn like the rest of the kids in my classroom. But once I was able to do that, I quickly realized that possession of knowledge wasn't going to differentiate me from the people around me—it was how I used my knowledge that would.

**Here's the truth:** Knowledge is not power. It only has the potential to be power. You can read this book and learn everything in it, but if you don't take it and apply the knowledge, it will be useless. All the books, podcasts, seminars, online programs, and inspiring social media posts in the world won't work until you put your knowledge into action.

It's easy to talk about what we learn, but I want to challenge you not to talk about it, but to show what you learned. It's better well done than well said. Don't promise, prove. Your results will speak for themselves.

**New belief:** Knowledge × Action = Power

## LIE NO. 5: LEARNING NEW THINGS IS VERY DIFFICULT

When we hear the word *learning*, we usually think of school. Few of us have fond memories of school. Even if we did well academically, school is typically a place associated with the growing pains of youth, where we felt romantic love for the first time (and probably rejection), and where we

experienced crushing boredom. For those of us who struggled in school, the added emotions of shame, doubt, and the ever-present feeling that we're too dumb to learn anything colors the word. It's no wonder that when we think of learning, we think of difficulty and strife.

Carol Greider is an American molecular biologist who won the Nobel Prize in 2009 for her part in discovering how telomeres change with age, which has an enormous potential for how we understand and treat cancer.[22] Greider has the distinction of being a Bloomberg Distinguished Professor and a Daniel Nathans Professor, and she is the director of molecular biology and genetics at John Hopkins University. With such an illustrious career, one would assume that Greider whizzed through school, but such was not the case.

"When I was in elementary school, I was considered a poor speller and somebody who couldn't sound out words, so I was taken into remedial classes," recalls Greider. "I remember having a tutor come down and take me out of class and bring me to a different room. It certainly felt like I wasn't as good as the other kids."[23]

It turned out she had dyslexia, a learning disability that affects parts of the brain that process language. Those who struggle with dyslexia have problems identifying speech sounds and relating them to letters and words, which results in difficulty reading and sometimes speaking.[24] Greider felt stupid and describes the situation as hard to overcome, but she didn't give up.

> I kept thinking of ways to compensate. I learned to memorize things very well because I just couldn't spell words. So later when I got to take classes like chemistry and anatomy where I had to memorize things, it turned out I was very good at that. I never planned a career. I had these blinders on that got me through a lot of things that might have been obstacles. I just went forward. It's a skill that I had early on that must have been adaptive.[25]

Even though school was hard at first, she found other ways to make up for her disability, and because of her ability to adapt, she became the kind of problem-solver who could not only learn but could contribute to research that changed the way we view cancer. Learning was hard for her, but she

figured out how to work around her disability. After all, it's not how smart you are, but how you are smart. Because Greider had to problem-solve her way through learning, she now has a career that is having an impact on the world.

The truth is that learning won't always be easy, but the effort pays dividends. In fact, learning should be at least a little uncomfortable; otherwise you're mostly reinforcing what you already know. If you've ever tried to cut wood with a dull blade, you know that it takes far more time and energy to accomplish the task than it should. In much the same way, lacking motivation or having inadequate methods will slow you down and make you feel as if learning is too hard (and we'll show you how to address those issues later in this book).

The key is taking small, simple steps. Think about a stonecutter. The stonecutter may sit there and hammer away at his block of stone for what feels like an eternity, making only small chips and dents here and there. But in one moment, the stone will crack open. Was it the one time that did it? No—it was all the sustained effort that prepared the stone to split.

Approach your learning like a stonecutter. It will require you to cultivate patience, to have a positive attitude, and to be adaptive to your own needs. If you are the kind of learner who does best with a book in your hands, that's fantastic. But if you already know that doesn't work for you, why keep trying the same thing? Look for other ways to learn that do work for you.

Know that it won't be hard, but it will require effort—though perhaps not as much as you think. The key is consistency. You must have the patience to consistently come back at it again and again. When you do, you will not only reap the rewards of your hard-earned knowledge, but you'll be a better person for having cultivated the tenacity to keep trying.

**Here's the truth:** Sometimes it *is* hard to learn new things. What's more accurate is to understand that learning is a set of methods, a process that can certainly be easier when you know how to learn.

**New belief:** When you learn new ways how to learn, the challenge of learning new things can be fun, easier, and more enjoyable.

# LIE NO. 6: THE CRITICISM OF OTHER PEOPLE MATTERS

Years ago I was a keynote speaker at an event hosted by Deepak Chopra. After my presentation, I sat down in the audience to watch the rest of the programming. To my surprise, a tall figure approached and loomed over me, and I looked up to see one of my favorite actors, Jim Carrey.

What followed was a deep conversation in the lobby about creativity. At one point he said, “Jim, I’m working on *Dumb and Dumber 2*, and I need to get really smart to be dumb and dumber.”

A few weeks later, we spent a day together at his home. During one of our breaks, while making guacamole (one of my favorite brain foods) in the kitchen, I asked, “Why do you do what you do? You’re such a unique actor, and you’re a little bit extreme on camera.” Jim said, “I act that way because I want to give the people who are watching permission to be themselves. The biggest travesty in the world is people preventing and limiting themselves from expressing who they really are because they’re afraid of what other people think.” This sentiment comes close to a religion for Jim; he calls it “freeing people from concern.” He elaborated on this during a commencement address at Maharishi International University:

> The purpose of my life had always been to free people from concern. . . . How will you serve the world? What do they need that your talent can provide? That’s all you have to figure out. . . . The effect you have on others is the most valuable currency there is. Everything you gain in life will rot and fall apart, and all that will be left of you is what was in your heart.[26]

The fastest learners on the planet are children, and that’s partly because they don’t care what others think of them. They have no shame around failing. They will fall 300 times and get up 300 times in the course of learning to walk, and don’t feel embarrassed; they just know they want to walk. As we get older, we have a harder time staying this open. We might take a singing lesson, or maybe a coding class, and if we hit a flat note or make a mistake as we learn, we shrink or stop.

Part of being limitless is learning to let go of the fear of criticism from other people. History is littered with examples of those who overcame the negative opinions of the people around them. The Wright brothers accomplished their incredible feat of making a machine fly through the air—and initially received virtually no acclaim for it. When they returned home from their inaugural flight on December 17, 1903, they were not met with brass bands and cigars and streamers. They were met with doubt.

Their biographer, Fred Kelly, wrote that the neighbors had a hard time believing what had happened. Said one: "I know you boys are truthful and if you say you flew through the air in the machine, I believe you. But then, down there on the Carolina coast, you had special conditions to help you. Of course, you couldn't do it anywhere else."[27]

Hardly the enthusiastic response one would expect, right?

The papers and media didn't report on their accomplishment, either. According to Kelly, noted scientists of the time had already explained why man couldn't fly, so no newspaper reporter was willing to report on the story for fear of being humiliated.[28] No editor wanted to print a story that directly refuted a respected scientist's proclamations that flying was not scientifically possible. The lack of public recognition didn't faze the Wright brothers. They knew they had more work to do and set about perfecting their flying machine, which eventually did earn the recognition that it deserved.

Most of us fear the opinions of other people when we simply think about trying something new. What the Wright's story shows is that public imagination is woefully underwhelming, and people have a hard time reconciling what they believe is possible with what is actually happening.

**Here's the truth:** Creating the life you want can be scary. But you know what's scarier? Regret. One day we will take our final breaths and not one of other people's opinions or your fears will matter. What will matter is how we lived. Don't take criticism from someone you wouldn't take advice from. People will doubt you and criticize you no matter what you do. You will never know your true potential until you break the unfair judgements you place on yourself. Don't allow other people's opinions and expectations to run or ruin your life.

**New belief:** It's not your job to like, love, or respect me. It's mine.

# LIE NO. 7: GENIUS IS BORN

Bruce Lee is known today as a film star, philosopher, and one of the most accomplished martial arts fighters in the history of the sport. And yet, given his background, you wouldn't have pegged him as a future icon if you were under the assumption that genius is born.

Lee's family moved from San Francisco to Hong Kong shortly after he was born.[29] Not long after they arrived, Hong Kong was occupied by Japan, making it a politically and socially tumultuous place to grow up. As a young man, Lee was faced with the difficulty of being the ultimate outsider. He was not purely Chinese, so the students in his classes made fun of him. He also wasn't British like other kids in his private school, so he was frequently taunted for being "oriental." The feeling of tension was ever-present for him—so he turned to fighting to battle his way through.[30] Fighting began to define him. His grades were low, and he fought so often in school that he transferred to a different primary school.

When Lee was 13, he met his teacher Yip Man, who taught him Wing Chun. He was accepted into this famous teacher's school and began to learn this style of Kung Fu. Not unlike the rest of his education, he was still taunted by the Chinese children who felt he was not enough like them to be "allowed" to learn the technique. He constantly had to prove himself and his abilities, and his fighting spilled over into the streets. This internal tension, coupled with Hong Kong's slide into gang violence, led to Lee fighting far more often than learning. He developed a reputation for being street-tough through his willingness and propensity for battle.

After one particularly bad street fight, a high-ranking police officer approached Lee's parents and told them their son would be arrested. The boy he had beat up the night before was the son of this police officer. Lee's father quickly arranged for Lee to go back to America; after all, he still had citizenship. So, off Lee went with $100 in his pocket. "Like most Chinese kids who had just gotten off the boat, my first job was washing and bussing dishes,"[31] said Lee in a later interview. He worked to support himself with odd jobs and eventually started teaching martial arts.

Lee wasn't just talented—he was also willing to teach other people, and he accepted everyone who came to him as a student, regardless of their race or background. This soon ruffled the feathers of the Chinese community in Oakland, who felt that these techniques should not be taught to anyone who

wasn’t Chinese. Eventually, he was forced to defend his right to teach. The Chinese traditionalists challenged him to a fight, saying that if he won, he could keep his school. But if he lost, he would be forced to shut it down and stop teaching to people outside of their ethnic group.

Lee’s style was different from any one form of martial arts. When he was still living in Hong Kong, he took dancing lessons, and in 1957 he was so good he won the cha-cha championship. He added the movements he learned in dance to his fighting techniques. Where other fighters took a mostly solitary stance with their feet, he kept his moving constantly, which fueled his ability to adapt to his opponent’s moves. Lee did this with everything he learned later in life. Eventually, his style incorporated not only Wing Chun, but boxing, fencing, and dancing.

It was a major turning point—the old vanguard against the new. Lee’s wife Linda was eight months pregnant at the time, and she remembers the scene vividly, almost comically. She recalls it took three minutes for Lee to get his opponent down to the ground; before this take-down, the opponent had run around the room, trying to get away from Lee.

After the fight, Linda found Lee with his head in his hands, despite his victory. He told her that his training didn’t prepare him for this kind of a battle. As she describes it, this was the beginning of the evolution to his own way of martial arts.

After this battle, Lee no longer tried to fit his knowledge and teachings into one box and discarded most of his original training. He openly took influences from areas of fighting outside of Wing Chun and Kung Fu, using them to form a philosophy of martial arts. In a later interview, he said, “I do not believe in styles anymore. I do not believe there is such a thing as the Chinese way of fighting, Japanese way of fighting.”[32] Instead, Lee’s approach focused on fighting as a way of ultimate self-expression. “When people come to me to learn, they’re not coming to me to learn to defend themselves. They want to learn to express themselves through movement, anger, or determination.” He believed that the individual is more important than any style or system.

No one remembers Lee for his academic endeavors. Lee is remembered for his tenacity, his ability to defeat his opponents, his philosophy, and for the way he managed to break out of the box of orthodox thinking and bring different styles of fighting together to create an entirely new philosophy. So

was he a natural genius, someone born to achieve outsize physical, mental, and philosophical feats?

In *The Talent Code*, author Daniel Coyle delves into whether talent is innate or whether it can be developed. He argues "greatness isn't born, it's grown." Through deep practice, ignition, and master coaching, anyone can develop a talent so deep that it looks like genius.[33]

Bruce Lee's daughter Shannon spoke at our annual conference about her father's approach to memory and learning. She said that, by the time Lee was a film star and notable teacher, he had already achieved thousands upon thousands of hours of deep practice, at least in part because of his early days in fighting on the streets. Later in life, Lee didn't master the famous one-inch punch in a day. That alone took years of hard repetition and practice. Lee continued to train and condition himself even with a back injury—it was a daily commitment. Ignition is the motivation, the fuel to do what you do. It seems Lee's initial fuel was the tension he felt as a Chinese American in a place that didn't accept him as either. Later, his ignition seems to have been his drive for ultimate self-expression. And finally, Lee had training from a master teacher, Yip Man, who himself was trained by several master teachers from the time he was a child. When Lee became his student, he had been teaching Kung Fu for decades.

Lee's talent was born of a confluence of experiences and circumstances that served him well, although they may have defeated someone else. How many of us would look at a young child with a propensity for fighting and poor grades and predict that he would become a master teacher and philosopher?

**Here's the truth:** Genius leaves clues. There is always a method behind what looks like magic.

**New belief:** Genius is not born; it's made through deep practice.

### *KWIK START*

How many of the LIEs described above did you believe in before reading this book? Are there any other ones you would add? Write them down.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

Understanding that these commonly held limiting beliefs are nothing more than myths is an essential part of becoming limitless. When you convince yourself that any of these are true, you're giving yourself an unnecessary burden to carry around. While these seven are among the most common, keep your radar up for any "conventional wisdom" that has the effect of putting constraints on your potential and examine that wisdom very carefully. In most cases, you're going to find that such constraints don't apply to anyone willing to push beyond them. Before going to the next chapter, give these things a try:

- Take a good look at some of the mistakes you've made. Have you let these define you? How have your feelings about these mistakes changed after reading this chapter?
- Find a way to put something you've recently learned (even today) into action. Notice the difference it makes when you turn knowledge into power.
- Think about a situation where you allowed the opinions of others to sway your actions. How would you approach that same situation differently if the only opinion that mattered was yours? Get my 4Gs to a limitless mindset, including more strategies for replacing limited beliefs, at LimitlessBook.com/resources.



"Culture is nourished by human motivation—a limitless resource that can sometimes be underestimated."

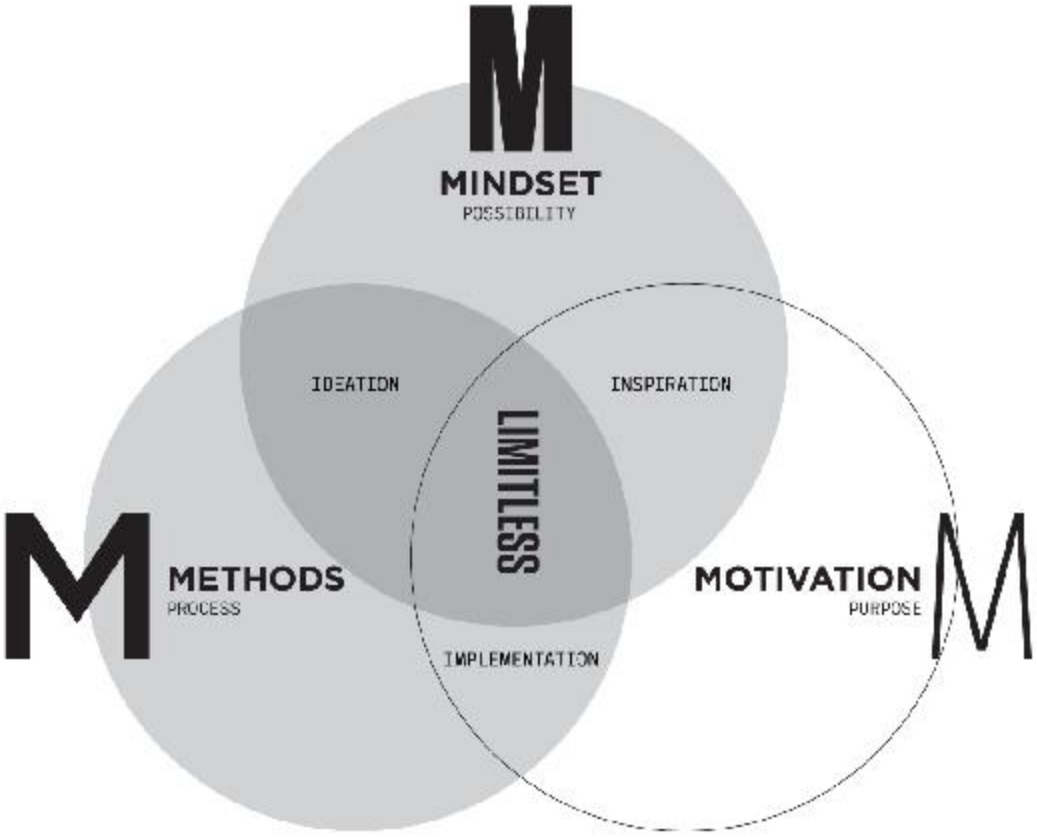


—LYNNE DOUGHTIE

# PART III

# LIMITLESS MOTIVATION

## THE WHY




**motivation**

mo·ti·va·tion *(noun)*

The purpose one has for taking action. The energy required for someone to behave in a particular way.

In the movie *Limitless*, writer Eddie Morra was completely unmotivated, unfocused, and had no energy. When he popped the pill that made him suddenly take action, his life drastically changed for the better because he was able to make things happen.

Let's unlimit a few LIEs commonly held around motivation. Contrary to popular belief, like your mindset, motivation is not fixed. No one has a set level of motivation. And when people say they are unmotivated, it's not completely true. They could have a high level of motivation to stay in bed and watch television.

Motivation also doesn't mean you must enjoy something that you need to do. My friend, entrepreneur Tom Bilyeu, hates working out, but he has a clear and compelling reason to do so, so he does it every morning. I really don't like taking cold showers, but I do it daily (I'll explain why in Chapter 8).

Finally, motivation is not something you wake up with or not. We put ourselves in a trance when we say, "I don't have any motivation." Motivation is not something you have; it's something you do. And it's entirely sustainable. Unlike a warm bath, it's not something that you experience for a moment and then lose unless you heat it up again. Motivation isn't derived from a seminar that temporarily pumps you up. It's a process. And since it's a strategy, you have control over it and can create it consistently by following the right recipe.

Here's the formula: Motivation = Purpose × Energy × $S^3$

When you combine purpose, energy, and small simple steps ($S^3$), you get sustainable motivation. And the ultimate form of motivation is the state of flow. Think about it as energy management. Creating it, investing it, and not wasting it. A clear purpose or reason gives you energy. Practices you employ will cultivate energy for your brain and the rest of your body, and small simple steps require little energy.

In this section, we'll talk about how to cultivate powerful sustainable motivation around learning and life that lasts. We'll achieve this by getting clear on your purpose, fostering the mental and physical energy that will sustain you, and establishing small simple steps. And tapping flow states.

Purpose drives us to act, and our purpose must be clear enough that we know why we're acting and what we're hoping to gain. Generating sufficient energy is vital—if you're tired or sleepy, or if your brain is foggy, then you won't have the fuel to take action. Small simple steps take minimal effort and keep you from being paralyzed with overwhelm. And finally, finding flow is the ultimate boon to motivation.



# 7

# PURPOSE

**How do certain defining phrases determine who you are?**

**How do your values define you?**

**What does your sense of purpose say about who you are?**

For the longest time, my kryptonite was lack of sleep. Sleep has never been easy for me. As a kid for years I was pulling regular all-nighters, studying long hours trying to compensate for my learning challenges. I developed bad sleeping problems. I was always tired at school, but I would plow through the fatigue anyway because I had a strong desire to work hard and make my family proud. My purpose and reasons were super-clear, so I was plenty motivated. Even after I learned accelerated learning skills at age 18 and I no longer had to put in crazy hours, my sleeplessness continued into adulthood and has grown steadily worse—two to four hours total of very interrupted sleep for about 20 years.

The longer you go without sleep, the harder it becomes to maintain a sense of reality—or motivation, for that matter. Lack of sleep compromises all of your cognitive skills, your focus, your memory, and your overall brain health. A common contributing factor for depression and many mood disorders is lack of sleep. I can attest to the dark places I've found myself in as a result of lack of sleep. My intense speaking and global travel schedule certainly did not help; one year I was on the road for 235 days. Time zones, jet lag, unfamiliar stale hotel rooms, you get the picture. And my brain was

feeling it; just imagine a memory expert forgetting what city he is waking up in.

This puzzled me, because as a long-time meditation student, my mind was not ruminating or racing at night; it was as calm as could be. It was only a handful of years ago, when I ended up hospitalized from multiple nights without rest, that I participated in an overnight sleep study and was diagnosed with severe obstructive sleep apnea, a physical disorder where evidently I stopped breathing more than 200 times each and every night.

Today, after multiple treatments, I'm happy to say my sleep is worlds better. Once I was able to fix the physical obstruction with surgery, I was then able to optimize my sleep with a number of tools I will cover in Chapter 8.

During my most difficult moments, I've asked myself why I continue to do what I do. Why struggle when I could easily tell myself I don't have the energy for this? As a child, my purpose and motivation (motive for taking action) was to compensate for my lack of talent with hard work, to prove to myself I was capable. But once I'd leveled up my learning, why did I continue to work so hard—despite being exhausted, sleep-deprived, and an extreme introvert—to make speech after speech, video after video, podcast after podcast? It's the same thing that drove me as a child: I have clear and definite purpose. I don't want anyone to struggle and suffer the way I did. The mission that drives me is to unlock better, brighter brains.

Often our greatest struggles lead to our greatest strengths. My two biggest challenges as a child were learning and public speaking. Life has a sense of humor because I spend most of my life public speaking on learning. I couldn't read, and now I teach people from all over the world how to read better. I struggled to understand my brain, and now I speak in front of audiences of thousands to help them understand the amazing tool they possess. I've learned there is a gift in most challenges. In the same way, decades of lack of sleep has given me two very important lessons.

First, it's forced me to live everything in this book. I wouldn't be able to perform at the level I do without the tools I've learned, so I've doubled down on everything I teach. I rarely have to prepare for a speech, because I use these skills every single day. I live them. It's who I am.

Second, I've had to become really clear on my purpose, my identity, my values, and my reasons for doing what I do every day. When you don't sleep, and you have a very limited amount of energy and focus, you don't

waste it. You prioritize and get crystal clear about your commitments and why you are making them. All of those choices have led to inexhaustible motivation. That's what we'll talk about in this chapter.

## START WITH WHY

Among my favorite books is *Start with Why* by Simon Sinek, who I've interviewed multiple times on my show. He often stresses the importance of being able to convey to others *why* you do *what* you do. If, Sinek explains, you can articulate the belief that is driving you (your why), people will want what you are offering. Or, as he so often says: "People don't buy *what* you do, they buy *why* you do it, so it follows that if you don't know *why* you do *what* you do, how will anyone else?"

There's a reason why the second of the magic questions is, "Why must I use this?" (Do you recall the other two questions?) For most children, their favorite word is *why*, which they're asking all the time. Do you know why it was important to memorize the periodic table or historic dates? If you don't, you probably don't remember them. We hear the words *purpose* and *goals* used frequently in business, but do we really know what they mean and how they are the same or different? A goal is the point one wishes to achieve. A purpose is the reason one aims at to achieve a goal.

Whether your goal is to read a book a week, learn another language, get in shape, or just leave the office on time to see your family, these are all things that you need to achieve. But how do you do this? One of the popular ways is setting SMART goals. Yes, this is an acronym:

- **S is for Specific:** Your goal should be well defined. Don't say you want to be rich; say you want to make a certain amount of money.
- **M is for Measurable:** If you can't measure your goal, you can't manage it. Getting fit isn't measurable—running a six-minute mile is.
- **A is for Actionable:** You wouldn't drive to a new town without asking for directions. Develop the action steps to achieve your goal.
- **R is for Realistic:** If you're living in your parents' basement, it's hard to become a millionaire. Your goals should challenge and stretch you, but not so much that you give up on them.

- **T is for Time-based:** The phrase, “A goal is a dream with a deadline” comes to mind. Setting a time to complete your goal makes you that much more likely to reach it.

The challenge for many people is that this process, while logical, is very heady. To get your goals out of your head and into your hands, make sure they fit with your emotions—with your HEART:

- **H is for Healthy:** How can you make sure your goals support your greater well-being? Your goals should contribute to your mental, physical, and emotional health.
- **E is for Enduring:** Your goals should inspire and sustain you during the difficult times when you want to quit.
- **A is for Alluring:** You shouldn’t always have to push yourself to work on your goals. They should be so exciting, enticing, and engaging that you’re pulled toward them.
- **R is for Relevant:** Don’t set a goal without knowing why you’re setting it. Ideally, your goals should relate to a challenge you’re having, your life’s purpose, or your core values.
- **T is for Truth:** Don’t set a goal just because your neighbor is doing it or your parents expect it of you. Make sure your goal is something you want, something that remains true to you. If your goal isn’t true to you, you’re far more likely to procrastinate and sabotage yourself.

## ON PURPOSE AND PASSION

Knowing your purpose in life helps you live with integrity. People who know their purpose in life know who they are, what they are, and why they are. And when you know yourself, it becomes easier to live a life that’s true to your core values.

Your life purpose consists of the central motivating aims of your life—the reasons you get up in the morning. Purpose can guide life decisions, influence behavior, shape goals, offer a sense of direction, and create meaning. For me, my life purpose is to create a world of better, brighter brains.

The English language is rife with words that get used interchangeably, as if they mean the same thing. Let's take the words *nice* and *kind*, for example. These two words are often used in the same way, but their roots reveal a different story. The origin of *nice* comes from the Latin word *nescius*, which means "ignorant." *Kind*, on the other hand, is of Germanic origin and is related to the word *kin*. The original sense of the word was "nature, the natural order," and "innate character, form, or condition." It morphed from the sense of "feeling of relatives with one another," and became a word that meant "friendly, deliberately doing good to others."[1]

Passion and purpose are in the same camp—they're often confused with one another. Both concepts are discussed all over the Internet, in motivational books, in TED talks. It's easy to feel as if you must be lacking if you don't feel a burning passion or purpose in your life. In my experience, however, passion and purpose are not the same thing; instead, one leads to the other.

Finding your passion is not about choosing the right path or finding the perfect professional destiny. It's about experimenting to see what ignites your joy. Passion comes when we rediscover our authentic, alive self, the one who has been muted and buried beneath a pile of other people's expectations. There is not a single right path to be discovered or revealed. Instead, I believe that when we exchange a fixed mindset for a growth mindset, as we discussed in Chapter 6 in the section on myths, we learn that interests can be developed through experience, investment, and struggle.

Furthermore, different passions can be cultivated simultaneously. You don't have to choose one over the other when you're exploring. Finding your passion is like finding true love, in that you have to go out on many dates to get to the perfect match. Once you find that special person, it doesn't just magically "work," because it takes effort to build a relationship. Finding your passion is no different—it takes experimentation to see what clicks for you, and it takes effort.

To sum it up, passion is what lights you up inside. My passion to learn was born out of such a struggle that it became a major part of my life's identity.

***KWIK START***

What are your current passions? List three.

Purpose, however, is about how you relate to other people. Purpose is what you're here to share with the world. It's how you use your passion. When you get down to it, we all have the same purpose: to help other people through our passion. The greatest task we have in life is to share the knowledge and skills we accumulate. It doesn't have to be more complex than that.

Your passion might be underwater basket weaving, but your purpose is to share underwater basket weaving with other people. My passion is learning, and my purpose is to teach other people to learn. This is so deeply ingrained that I don't have to force myself to do it—it comes naturally. I wake up ready, motivated, and excited to help people learn.

Podcast guest Jonathan Fields, founder of the Good Life Project, believes that we will naturally have many passions over the course of our lives. Because you will change, the medium through which you express your passions will change, too. He believes that if you define yourself by one very specific passion and your life changes in a way that doesn't allow you to pursue that passion any longer, you might feel lost. The key is finding the underlying meaning in your passions to find a new way of channeling your expression.

***KWIK START***

Do you know your life's purpose? Even if you don't yet, write down a little bit about what it could be.

## WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

What often isn't discussed in the quest for motivation is identity —who you are . . . and who you *think* you are at your core. They say the two most

powerful words in the English language are the shortest: “I am.” Whatever you put after those two words determines your destiny.

Let’s say you want to stop smoking. Maybe you’ve had a few warnings from your doctor, and you’re finally coming around to the idea that you should quit. If you identify as a smoker and regularly say, “I am a smoker,” it’s going to be difficult to quit until you dismantle that identity. When you say you are defined by a particular action, you are essentially priming yourself to identify with and justify a certain behavior.

This is so integral to behavior change that it can’t be overstated. A fascinating study out of Stanford University showed the effects of priming on participants. Researcher Christopher Bryan separated participants into two groups. The first group responded to a questionnaire that included phrases like “to vote” and questions like “How important is it to you to vote?” The second group’s questionnaire had slightly altered questions, like “How important is it to you to *be a voter* [emphasis added]?”[2] The participants were also asked whether they planned to vote in the upcoming elections. Later, researchers used public voting records to confirm whether the participants had voted or not. Bryan and his team found that the participants whose survey included personally identifying statements like “voter” were 13 percent more likely to vote than those who were simply asked about the likelihood that they would vote.[3]

When you consciously decide to identify with the habit or goal you want to create or achieve, or consciously un-identify with a habit you no longer want, you will experience enormous power. If you’ve been telling yourself all of your life that you are a slow learner, or that you can’t learn, you might start telling yourself “I am a fast and efficient learner” instead. The highest drive we have is to act consistently with how we perceive ourselves—it is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. Use it to your benefit.

### *KWIK START*

Take 60 seconds and, stream of consciousness, write down some “I am” statements.

## A HIERARCHY OF VALUES

Next, we need to consider our values. You can set up the most well-thought-out habits, but if your values are not in alignment with the ultimate goal, you're not going to do it. For example, someone who wants to remember people's names should value relationships and their connection to other people. Your behavior has to support your values in some way, or there is no drive for it.

Our values have a hierarchy to them. If I asked you what's most important to you in life, you might tell me family is one of your core values. I would then ask what family does for you. For me, it provides love. For you, it might provide belonging. The important distinction here is that family is a *means value*—a means to an end. The *end value* is actually love or belonging. When we look at our values, we can determine whether the value we've stated is an end or whether it evokes something else.

Values need to be prioritized. My values are love, growth, contribution, and adventure, in that order. Each value builds on and contributes to the next. One's values tend to not change from year to year unless you experience life conditions that change them—such as having a kid, losing a loved one, or ending a relationship, to name just a few.

When we're unaware of our values and the values of the people closest to us, it creates a space for conflict to arise; discord usually results from values conflicting. Let's say your values include adventure and freedom. If your partner values safety and security, it's no surprise that you'll often be at odds. It's not that one set of values is right and the other is wrong—it's that they aren't in alignment. Or let's say both of you highly value respect, but what you consider to be respectful or disrespectful differs. There's still room for disagreement unless you've talked about what constitutes respect.

## FINDING YOUR REASONS

When it comes to doing anything in life, reasons reap rewards. My story is evidence that feeling good is not required to feel motivated. If I waited until that day, I would have stopped teaching others to learn better when my sleeping problems escalated. And besides, how many times have we felt good on a given day and still not done what we said we would do? You

could feel amazing and still get nothing done if your reasons for doing so are not strong enough.

Reasons that are tied to your purpose, identity, and values will sufficiently motivate you to act, even in the face of all of the daily obstacles that life puts in your way. The healthy 70-year-old doesn't go to the gym at 4:35 A.M. because he likes it—he goes because maintaining his health so he can continue to be with his family is motivation enough to him, even though he would much rather sleep in. The good student doesn't pick up her textbook because she's in a good mood. She does it because she wants to ace that test so she has the best chances of landing the internship that will lead to her dream job.

It's likely that there's a good reason behind every task you need to accomplish, even the unpleasant ones. You don't love making dinner, but you want your family to eat well and you understand the dangers of overreliance on take-out and fast food. You're uncomfortable giving speeches, but you know that your team is relying on you to rally the whole organization behind your project at the conference. You find economics daunting and a little boring, but you need the class to get your marketing degree, and you can't wait to put your marketing skills to work in the real world.

If you're struggling to find motivation to learn, or to accomplish anything else in your life, there is a good chance you haven't uncovered the *why* of the task. Consider your passion, your desired identity, and your values: How can they create the basis for your reasons? You already know that you're much more likely to remember something when you're motivated to remember it. Conversely, if you don't find any motivation in knowing someone's name, you're going to forget it as soon as you move on to your next conversation. Let's say your passion is to help people forge better relationships, you identify as a connector, and one of your values is love. Your reasons for learning to remember names could be simple to find: "I want to learn to remember names so that I can better connect with people in my community and help foster a stronger network of people I care about."

Right now, stop and consider three reasons that you want to learn better. Your reasons should be concrete, like: "I want to learn Spanish so that I can finally speak to my father-in-law," or "I want to learn American history so I can help my kid learn better in school," or "I want to learn how to research

better so I can finish my business plan and find an investor for my company." Write them down.

Having reasons has helped me become crystal clear when it comes to commitments. A big part of self-love is being protective of your time and energy. Setting boundaries around your time, emotions, mental health, and space is incredibly vital at any time, but especially when you don't sleep. When you lack any necessary fuel, such as sleep or food, your resources aren't as abundant as they are at other times, so protecting what you have becomes very important. When I make decisions, everything is either a heaven yes or heaven no (just trying to keep it clean here). If I don't feel completely aligned with something, I don't do it, because I don't have the energy to spare. And I can honestly say that I don't suffer from FOMO (fear of missing out). In the last few weeks I've been invited to a handful of social and work gatherings but declined because I'm clear about my purpose and motivation in spending time writing this book. I'd love for you to join me in celebrating JOMO—the joy of missing out.

Most of us feel tired and fatigued these days. I believe that's because we feel like we need to say "yes" to every opportunity, invite, or request that comes our way. While it's great to be open-minded and consider options, when you say yes to something, you need to be careful that you're not inadvertently saying no to yourself and your own needs.

## WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO LOSE?

What is motivation? Motivation is a set of emotions (painful and pleasurable) that act as the fuel for our actions. Where does it come from? Motivation comes from purpose, fully feeling and associating with the consequences of our actions (or inactions).

Let's do an exercise. Write down all the *disadvantages* you have to face if you do not learn to use the material in this book. What will it cost you right now and in the future? For example, you could write, "I will have to keep studying hard and settle for the same mediocre grades or job." Or, "I won't be able to spend time with my loved ones," or "I won't get that raise." The key is to make sure you feel the emotions. Don't make this an intellectual thing. We make decisions based on how we feel. Really feel the

pain that you will have if you don't do something about it. This is the only way for you to make a change last and to get you to follow through.

Pain can be your teacher, if you use it and not let it use you. Use pain to drive you to make things happen. If you are honest, you may write something like: "I will have to settle for a job I hate, make very little money, have no free time for myself or anyone else, and I will have to put up with it for the rest of my life, bored and frustrated." This will get you to do something about it! Do this now.

Now, here is the more exciting part. Write down all of the *benefits* and *advantages* you will receive from learning the skills and techniques in this book. Make a list of things that will really get you excited and motivated. For instance: "I'll be able to ace my tests, have more time to be with family, start that business, and learn new languages to travel the world." Or, "I will have more free time to exercise and get healthy, to go away for spring break, and to spend more time with my boy/girlfriend!" Or maybe something simple like, "I will finally have some free time to just get caught up and relax!"

Again, make sure your reasons are compelling enough to be backed with real emotion. You must really get yourself to see and feel the benefits of learning this material. Do this now.

## TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now, let's apply all of this to learning. As you move through this "Motivation" section of the book, I want you to consider where learning fits into your passion, identity, values, and reasons.

It was not until I was an adult that I found my passion and purpose. Through my struggle to learn, I developed a love of learning because it helped me become unlimited, and my purpose is teaching other people to learn so they can unlimit themselves.

As a kid, I forced myself to study, trying to rise to the level of average. I had a lot of identity issues to resolve; I was the boy with the broken brain, and I believed that I was stupid. I had to change the way I saw myself and give up the identity that kept me locked into being unable to learn. Instead of saying "I am broken," I had to say, "I am a learner."

As for values, as I mentioned earlier I value growth and adventure. For me, learning falls under both of these, because it contributes directly to my growth and it gives me a sense of adventure, especially when I learn something novel and challenging. There's no ambiguity here; learning directly contributes to the fulfillment of my values.

Every single one of my reasons keeps me motivated so that I can help more people learn. As any author knows, writing a book is a challenge. But my reason for writing this book—to teach my methods to a wider audience around the world that may not have access to my online courses—has kept me going.

If you're trying to force motivation, but you haven't addressed these invisible, limiting identities, you won't get very far. When you feel stuck, come back to the way your goal fits into your values, and then ask yourself what needs to be brought back into alignment.

Going back to the previous chapter's list of the seven lies that hold you back, perhaps the eighth lie is that you *have* motivation —that you wake up and feel motivated every day. The reality is that you *do* motivation. Ultimately, motivation is a set of habits and routines, guided by your values and your identity, that you carry out every day.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

Finding your passion is about giving yourself novelty and putting yourself in a new environment to see what lights you up. It's difficult to do that if you feel limited or if you're self-conscious about looking bad, so let that go and enjoy the experience. Those initial moments of discomfort just might lead you to an entirely new passion and purpose in life. Here are a few things to try before moving on to the next chapter:

- Write down a list of your most common "I am" statements. How do you feel about the ways in which these statements define you?
- Create a list of the things you value the most. Now prioritize that list and think about how this aligns with your definition of yourself.
- Get into the habit of asking the question "why" before you do anything.

"You see, when
you give your body
the best possible fuel,
you have more energy,
you're stronger,
you think
more quickly."



—MICHELLE OBAMA

# 8

# ENERGY

**How do you make sure your brain is as healthy and energized as it can be?**

**What should I make sure to have in my diet if I want my brain to be at its strongest?**

**How do I consistently get a good night's sleep?**

You have a clear purpose for doing something, and you've broken down the project or goal into small, simple steps. Does that guarantee sustainable, limitless motivation?

For example, even if you have a reason to read daily and have a plan to read for just five minutes a day, what can keep you from doing so is fatigue. Mental and physical vitality is the fuel needed to drive your actions. We know the importance of time management. Well, motivation is all about energy management and optimization.

Here are my 10 recommendations for generating limitless brain energy. For each tip, please rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much attention you are putting into that specific area. You may be surprised by your answers.

## 1. A GOOD BRAIN DIET

Resiliency expert Dr. Eva Selhub often likens the brain to a high-performance vehicle. "Like an expensive car," she writes, "your brain functions best when it gets only premium fuel. Eating high-quality foods

that contain lots of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants nourishes the brain and protects it from oxidative stress—the 'waste' (free radicals) produced when the body uses oxygen, which can damage cells."[1] She goes on to note that when your brain is forced to run on inferior fuel, it can't possibly do everything it was built to do. Refined sugar, for example, contributes to impaired brain function, leads to inflammation, and can even cause depression (something you might want to consider the next time you reach for a tub of ice cream to contend with a tough day).

In my podcast interviews with Dr. Lisa Mosconi, neuroscientist, integrative nutritionist, and author of *Brain Food* and *The XX Brain*, she explains why the dietary needs of the brain are different from those of other organs. "The human brain requires 45 distinct nutrients to function best. While most of these nutrients are created by the brain itself, the rest are imported from our diet."[2]

Since we know for sure that there's a direct connection between a good diet and a healthy brain, it's essential that you feed your brain with the best food nature has to offer. On the page opposite, you'll see a list of my top 10 favorite brain foods. (For a quick video on how to memorize this list, go to www.LimitlessBook.com/resources.) If you're the kind of person who hates hearing you need to eat your vegetables, employing this list might require a bit of an adjustment. But there's some good news, because there's evidence to show that your brain runs very well with a little bit of dark chocolate in the mix. Remember, what you eat matters, especially for your gray matter.

### *KWIK START*

What are your favorite brain foods? How can you incorporate one more into your daily diet?

#### THE TOP 10 BRAIN FOODS

**Avocados:** They provide monounsaturated fat, which helps to maintain healthy blood flow.

**Blueberries:** They protect your brain from oxidative stress and reduce the effects of brain aging. There have also been studies that show they can help with memory.

**Broccoli:** A great source of vitamin K, which is known to improve cognitive function and memory.

**Dark chocolate:** This helps your focus and your concentration and stimulates endorphins. Chocolate also has flavonoids, which have been shown to improve cognitive function. The darker here the better, as the darkest chocolate has the least sugar, and we've already talked about how sugar is something to eat sparingly.

**Eggs:** They provide memory-improving and brain-boosting choline.

**Green leafy vegetables:** These are good sources of vitamin E, which reduces the effects of brain aging, and folate, which has been shown to improve memory.

**Salmon, Sardines, Caviar:** They're rich in omega-3 essential fatty acids, which help reduce the effects of brain aging.

**Turmeric:** It helps reduce inflammation and boost antioxidant levels while also improving your brain's oxygen intake. There's also some indication that turmeric helps reduce cognitive decay.

**Walnuts:** These nuts provide high levels of antioxidants and vitamin E that protect your neurons and protect against brain aging. They also contain high levels of zinc and magnesium, which are really good for your mood.

**Water:** Your brain is about 80 percent water. Dehydration can cause brain fog, fatigue, and slower reaction and thinking speed. Studies show that well-hydrated people score better on brainpower tests.

I met Mona Sharma when she was featured on Facebook's Red Table Talk as the nutritionist for Will Smith and his family, alongside Dr. Mark Hyman. She shared with me how "the foods we eat can have a big impact on our energy, the quality of our health, and the function of our brains. Focusing on key ingredients like good quality omega-3 rich fats, vegetables loaded with antioxidants and phytonutrients, and spices to enhance our digestion and focus, and can support both short- and long-term brain

function.” Here’s a sample day of some of her go-to recipes to optimize brain power and vitality:

## MORNING BRAIN TONIC

Serves 2

***Ingredients:***

**2-inch piece of ginger, peeled and cut into slices**
**2-inch piece of turmeric, peeled and cut into slices (note: this will stain, so watch clothes and countertops)**
**4 cups filtered water**
**organic green tea (loose or plastic-free tea bags for 2 servings)**
**½ organic lemon, juiced**
**Dash of black pepper**
**Raw honey (optional)**

Place the turmeric, ginger, and water into a small saucepan.

Bring to a slow simmer on medium-high heat. Add the green tea and simmer for at least 5 minutes.

Remove from the heat. Add the lemon juice, dash of black pepper, and honey (if using).

Strain and serve hot. Avoid eating for 20 minutes after drinking this tonic.

*Note: You can also make a large batch of the tonic mix ahead of time. Simply add a larger quantity of turmeric, ginger, and lemon to a juicer. Place this juice into the fridge, covered tightly with a lid, for up to 7 days. When serving, just add to hot water and green tea.*

## MORNING MAGIC SMOOTHIE

Serves 1

***Ingredients:***

**½ cup frozen wild blueberries**
**½ cup chopped jicama (peel removed)**
**Big handful of organic spinach (you can add more, too!)**
**2 tablespoons hemp seeds**
**1 teaspoon MCT oil**
**1 teaspoon organic spirulina powder**

**½ cup unsweetened coconut water**
**½ cup unsweetened almond milk**
**Ice (optional)**

Add all ingredients to a blender, blend, and start your day with brain and body fuel!

## BRAIN BOOST SALAD

Serves 2

***For the salad:***

**2 cups organic arugula**
**2 cups organic spinach**
**¼ cup pomegranate seeds**
**¼ cup raw walnuts, chopped**
**1 avocado, sliced**
**4 organic eggs, boiled then sliced when cool (if vegan, replace eggs with 2 tablespoons hemp seeds and 1 tablespoon pumpkin seeds)**

***For the dressing:***

**3 tablespoons raw apple cider vinegar**
**¼ cup extra virgin olive oil**
**½ lemon squeezed**
**1 tablespoon raw honey**
**¼ teaspoon Himalayan sea salt**
**2 tsp black sesame seeds (for garnish)**

Place all salad dressing ingredients (except sesame seeds) into a bowl or mixing container and blend/shake well. Set aside.

Add the arugula, spinach, pomegranate seeds, and walnuts to a large salad bowl.

Pour salad dressing on top of the salad and mix together.

Transfer the mixed salad onto two plates. Top each salad with ½ sliced avocado and 2 sliced eggs. Garnish with sesame seeds. Enjoy!

## EASY ROASTED SALMON & BROCCOLI WITH SWISS CHARD

Serves 2

***Ingredients:***

**2 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice**
**2 teaspoon of chopped garlic**
**5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided**
**2 salmon fillets, preferably wild not farmed (4 to 6 ounces each)**
**2 to 4 slices of lemon**
**1 large head of organic broccoli, chopped into bite-sized florets (3 to 4 cups)**
**2 teaspoons Himalayan sea salt, divided**
**1 small shallot, finely chopped**
**1 small bunch organic Swiss chard or rainbow chard, finely chopped**
**1 teaspoon organic mustard seed powder**

Line a large sheet pan with parchment paper and preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Mix the lemon juice, chopped garlic, and 2 tablespoons olive oil in a small bowl.

Lay the salmon down in the middle of the sheet pan and pour the lemon–garlic–olive oil mixture on top of each fillet evenly. Then place the lemon slices on top of each fillet.

Mix the broccoli florets, 2 tablespoons olive oil, and 1 teaspoon sea salt together in a large bowl. Place the mixture around each salmon fillet on the sheet pan.

Place in the preheated oven and bake for 20 minutes.

While the salmon and broccoli are baking, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil on low heat in a skillet. Add the chopped shallot, stirring often until clear and cooked. Add the Swiss chard with 2 tablespoons water to the skillet and cook for 3 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally until the chard is softened. Remove from heat.

Add the salmon, broccoli, and chard to two serving plates. Sprinkle the broccoli with mustard seed powder to boost anti-inflammatory benefits. Serve and enjoy!

## COCOA-CINNAMON-GINGER “HOT CHOCOLATE”

Serves 2

***Ingredients:***

**4 cups unsweetened almond or coconut milk**
**2-inch ginger piece, peeled and sliced lengthwise**
**3 tablespoons unsweetened raw organic cocoa powder**
**1 teaspoon organic cinnamon powder**
**1 to 2 tablespoons coconut sugar (sweeten as desired)**
**½ teaspoon vanilla extract**
**Small pinch of sea salt**
**2 cinnamon sticks, as garnish**

Heat the almond milk and ginger slices in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Bring to a gentle simmer.

Add the cocoa powder, cinnamon, coconut sugar, vanilla, and sea salt and whisk until dissolved.

Bring to a gentle simmer once again before removing from the heat. Pour into two mugs, using a strainer to prevent the ginger from going into the cups. Add one cinnamon stick to each mug and enjoy!

*Note: This drink can be served cooled during the summer months. Also, if serving as a dessert, add one dollop of coconut cream and blend for a sweeter, frothier taste.*

# 2. BRAIN NUTRIENTS

As we've discussed, diet affects brain function. But what if you aren't able, because of your schedule or lifestyle, to regularly eat a rich brain-food diet? Research has shown that particular nutrients have a direct effect on your cognitive ability. I always prefer getting my nutrients from real, whole, organic foods. Talk to your qualified health practitioner to learn what you might be deficient in.

In my podcast episode with Max Lugavere, author of *Genius Foods*, we discussed the benefits of supplementing with phospholipid DHA—your brain uses this to create healthy cell membranes.[3] This is important because our cell membranes form all the receptors involved in mood, executive functioning, attention, and memory. B vitamins have been shown to improve women's memories. Curcumin, the nutrient found in turmeric, can

forestall cognitive decay. You can get a list of nutrients and their effect on the brain from the National Institutes of Health website.[4]

There are natural sources for all of these nutrients, but getting all of them into your diet might not fit your lifestyle or your palate. The good news is that supplements are readily available for all of these (though not all supplements are created equal; make sure to do some research). You can also combine these with the brain foods discussed in this chapter to give your brain the fuel it needs. For a list and links to my favorite brain supplements, go to www.LimitlessBook.com/resources.

## 3. EXERCISE

"Exercise changes the brain in ways that protect memory and thinking skills," writes Heidi Godman, the executive editor of the *Harvard Health Letter*. "In a study done at the University of British Columbia, researchers found that regular aerobic exercise, the kind that gets your heart and your sweat glands pumping, appears to boost the size of the hippocampus, the brain area involved in verbal memory and learning."[5]

I can almost hear some of you complaining or making excuses as you read that last paragraph: Exercise is boring. You don't have time for it. You can't afford a gym membership. But the simple fact is that exercise is enormously valuable if you want to unshackle your brain. Think about it: When you're active and moving, you feel sharper, right? Some of us even *need* to move around in order to get our brains operating at top efficiency. That's because there's a direct correlation between exercise and brain function. And you don't need to become an Olympic athlete in order to keep your brain sharp. There's lots of evidence to show that even 10 minutes of aerobic exercise a day can have enormous benefits.

As your body moves, your brain grooves. Check out a few of my favorite exercise videos at www.LimitlessBook.com/resources.

***KWIK START***

Set your phone alarm to remind yourself to move for a few minutes every hour.

# 4. KILLING ANTS

Dr. Daniel Amen, a clinical neuroscientist, author of the bestseller *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*, and a frequent guest of ours, came home one night after a particularly bad day at the office dealing with suicide risks, angst-ridden teens, and dysfunctional couples to find thousands of ants in his kitchen. “It was gross,” he wrote. “As I started to clean them up, the acronym came to me. I thought of my patients from that day—like my infested kitchen, my patients’ brains were also infested by the negative thoughts that were robbing them of their joy and stealing their happiness. The next day, I brought a can of ant spray to work as a visual aid and have been working diligently ever since to help my patients eradicate their ANTs.”[6]

ANTs are “automatic negative thoughts” and, if you’re like most people, you place limitations on yourself in the form of these thoughts at least some of the time. Maybe you tell yourself that you aren’t smart enough to learn a skill that you’d really like to have. Or perhaps you repeat on an endless loop how pushing yourself to accomplish something is only going to lead to disappointment.

ANTs are everywhere, and there isn’t enough ant spray in the world to get rid of all of them. But eliminating them from your life is an essential part of unlimiting your brain. The reason for this is simple: If you fight for your limitations, you get to keep them. If you regularly tell yourself that you can’t do something, or that you’re too old to do something, or that you don’t have the smarts to do something, you won’t do that thing. Only when you move on from this kind of destructive self-talk can you truly accomplish what you want to accomplish.

***KWIK START***

What is your biggest ANT? What could you replace it with?

# 5. A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

A 2018 piece in the medical journal *The Lancet* identified that “air pollution might cause 30 percent of all strokes and thus might be one of the leading contributors of the global stroke burden.” It went on: “Given the strong association between stroke, vascular risk factors, and dementia, the suggested link between air pollution and dementia is to be expected.”[7] The air you breathe is critical to the way your brain functions. If you’ve ever been stuck in a room with a smoker, you know how hard it is to even think while you’re breathing that toxic air. Conversely, if you’re hiking in the mountains and take a deep breath from the crisp, clean atmosphere, you can feel your senses thriving.

If you live in a factory town or a big city with pollutants everywhere, there isn’t a lot you can do about the air around you. Fortunately, there are devices available to clean the air in your home and in your office, and you can make an increased effort to get to cleaner spaces more frequently.

A clean environment goes beyond air quality. Removing clutter and distractions from your surroundings will make you feel lighter and improve your ability to focus, so take time to Marie Kondo your mind and remove any unnecessary stuff.

***KWIK START***

What is one thing you can do today to clean your environment?

# 6. A POSITIVE PEER GROUP

Your brain potential is not just related to your biological networks or your neurological networks; it is also related to your social networks. Who you spend time with is who you become. Motivational speaker Jim Rohn says that you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with. Whether you believe that or not, I don’t think any of us can disagree with the notion that the people around us have a meaningful influence on our lives. A recent Temple University study showed that people (specifically teenagers in this study) act differently when they are alone than they do when they are with others. In reporting on the study for *The New York Times*, Tara Parker-Pope said that “Dr. Steinberg [one of the authors of the

study] notes that the brain system involved in reward processing is also involved in the processing of social information, explaining why peers can have such a pronounced effect on decision making."[8]

Because of this influence, those you spend time with have a genuine effect on brain function. Certainly, they affect your self-talk, as most of us tie at least a part of our beliefs to the beliefs others have about us. But they can affect everything from what you eat to how much you exercise, to even how much sleep you get. There are lots of books out there dedicated to helping you distinguish people who are good for you from people who are not, but for the purposes of this chapter, just take a few minutes to think about who your peers are, how much influence they have on your life, and how this affects your desire to unlimit yourself.

***KWIK START***

Who is someone you need to spend more time with? Reach out and make a date with that person now.

# 7. BRAIN PROTECTION

This probably goes without saying, but protecting your brain is critical if you're going to make the most of your brain. You have only one brain. If you were given only one car to use for the rest of your life, how well would you treat that car? You would take care of it as if your life depended on it. Accidents are unavoidable, but putting yourself in situations where brain injury is less likely improves your chances of avoiding the worst. Hard-contact or extreme sports are not ideal if you want to make the most of this precious asset. Driving 20 miles an hour over the speed limit all the time on your motorcycle isn't advisable, either. If you love these things too much to give them up, at the very least take as many precautions and use as many safety tools as you can.

# 8. NEW LEARNING

One of the most important things you can do for the health of your brain is to keep learning. We are all capable of expanding the capacities of our brains, even as we get older, which we discussed when we talked about neuroplasticity in Chapter 3.

What this means is that, as long as we keep learning, we continue to create new pathways in our brains. We keep our brains plastic and supple, capable of processing new information in relevant ways. This is especially true if we give ourselves genuine challenges in our learning. Attempting to master a new skill, to discover a new language, to embrace parts of your culture or the cultures of others that are new to you all keep those neurons firing and creating new pathways. By increasing the ways you use your brain, you increase the capabilities of your brain.

***KWIK START***

Create an ongoing "To Learn" list. What are some things on that list? Write two down.

## 9. STRESS MANAGEMENT

We all experience some level of stress in our everyday lives, sometimes a great deal of stress. Whenever we experience stress, a hormone known as cortisol is released to alleviate the physical rigors of stress on our bodies. If this happens occasionally, it's not a problem, but if it happens with great regularity, the buildup of cortisol in our brains can lead it to cease functioning properly.

But there's more. "There is evidence that chronic (persistent) stress may actually rewire your brain," says a piece on the Harvard Health Blog. "Scientists have learned that animals that experience prolonged stress have less activity in the parts of their brain that handle higher-order tasks—for example, the prefrontal cortex—and more activity in the primitive parts of their brain that are focused on survival, such as the amygdala. It's much like what would happen if you exercised one part of your body and not another. The part that was activated more often would become stronger, and the part that got less attention would get weaker. This is what appears to happen in

the brain when it is under continuous stress: it essentially builds up the part of the brain designed to handle threats, and the part of the brain tasked with more complex thought takes a back seat."[9]

With such clear evidence that stress can be debilitating to your brain, finding ways to reduce or avoid stress becomes critical. I'm going to offer a number of suggestions in this area over the course of this book.

***KWIK START***

What is your favorite thing to do to cope with stress? When was the last time you did it?

# 10. SLEEP

If you want better focus, you need to get good sleep. If you want to be a clearer thinker, you need to get good sleep. If you want to make better decisions or have a better memory, you need to get good sleep. According to the National Institutes of Health:

> Quality sleep—and getting enough of it at the right times—is as essential to survival as food and water. Without sleep you can't form or maintain the pathways in your brain that let you learn and create new memories, and it's harder to concentrate and respond quickly. Sleep is important to a number of brain functions, including how nerve cells (neurons) communicate with each other. In fact, your brain and body stay remarkably active while you sleep. Recent findings suggest that sleep plays a housekeeping role that removes toxins in your brain that build up while you are awake.[10]

The takeaway: getting enough sleep—and getting enough *quality* sleep—is essential if you're going to make the most of your brain.

## Sleep Is Not a Choice

I know there are lots of people out there who say they don't need a lot of sleep, or that they don't have time for sleep, or even consider it a point of pride that their lives are so full of activity that they "have no choice" but to sacrifice sleep. That's a mistake, and, if you're one of these people, it's something I want you to reconsider right now.

"Sleep is crucial to overall health and daily functioning," writes Dr. Jean Kim, a psychiatrist and a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at George Washington University. "Increasing evidence has tied lack of sleep to a host of mental and physical disorders, including increased depression, irritability, impulsivity, cardiovascular disease, and more. One study noted that sleep actually functions as a sort of laundry cycle for the brain, where during sleep, blood vessels (and lymphatic channels) in the brain hyperperfuse and flush out metabolic buildup from the day and remove neurotoxins and distribute components that enhance cellular repair."[11]

In his TED talk about sleep, Dr. Jeff Iliff of Oregon Health and Science University takes the "laundry cycle" metaphor even further. He notes that, while we're awake, the brain is so busy doing other things that it doesn't have the capacity to clean itself of waste. The buildup of this waste, amyloid-beta, is now being linked to the development of Alzheimer's disease.

"When the brain is awake and is at its most busy, it puts off clearing away the waste from the spaces between its cells until later, and then, when it goes to sleep and doesn't have to be as busy, it shifts into a kind of cleaning mode to clear away the waste from the spaces between its cells, the waste that's accumulated throughout the day."[12]

A little later in the talk, Iliff warns against doing something that so many of us do: sacrificing sleep until we get a chance to catch up. "Like our housework, it's a dirty and a thankless job, but it's also important. In your house, if you stop cleaning your kitchen for a month, your home will become completely unlivable very quickly. But in the brain, the consequences of falling behind may be much greater than the embarrassment of dirty countertops, because when it comes to cleaning the brain, it is the very health and function of the mind and the body that's at stake, which is why understanding these very basic housekeeping functions of the brain today may be critical for preventing and treating diseases of the mind tomorrow."[13]

So, if you're one of the many people who have convinced themselves that there's a level of nobility in getting by with minimal sleep, it's time to revise your thinking. There's simply too much to gain from a good night's sleep (including what you can learn from your dreams).

## Getting through the Night

It's one thing to say you're going to get a good night's sleep. It's another thing entirely to accomplish it. About a quarter of all Americans experience some level of insomnia every year.[14]

There is, however, very strong evidence connecting exercise to sleep, even among chronic insomnia sufferers. A study performed by Dr. Kathryn J. Reid and others found that aerobic exercise had strong positive results on a group of participants who'd previously regularly encountered sleep problems. "Results from this study indicate that a sixteen-week program of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity plus sleep hygiene education is effective in improving self-reported sleep quality, mood, and quality of life in older adults with chronic insomnia," the authors wrote. "These results highlight the potential of structured physical activity programs to improve the effectiveness of standard behavioral approaches for the treatment of insomnia, particularly in a sedentary older adult population."[15]

A group at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine built upon this study by drilling down on the data gleaned and then studying the interconnection between exercise and sleep. What they found is important to consider: exercise is not a magic pill. If you're having trouble sleeping, you can't solve the problem with one session at the gym. They found that, even after two months, the effects of exercise on sleep were minimal. But by the end of the 16-week study, the results were considerable, with participants getting as much as an hour-and-a-quarter extra sleep per night.[16]

So, there's a clear connection between exercise and sleep, but you're going to need to give it time. But, given the overall benefits of exercise on your health, committing to an exercise routine is always a good idea, even if you won't feel the benefits on your sleep right away.

There are varying ideas about how much exercise is necessary to affect sleep, but a commonly stated amount is 2.5 hours a week of aerobic exercise, coupled with some resistance work. "Brisk walking, light biking,

elliptical machine, anything that increases your heart rate so that you can still talk while exercising but have to catch your breath every few sentences or so, is considered moderate exercise," recommends Dr. Christopher E. Kline of the University of Pittsburgh.[17]

## Giving Your Mind a Break

One of the many reasons why people have trouble sleeping, is not being able to get your mind to turn off. We've all been there: You have a huge meeting coming up, or something disruptive (either positive or negative) happened during the day, or you got a phone call just before bedtime that got you riled up. Your head hits the pillow, but you might as well be running laps around your house because your mind is busy with this inciting event. You wind up lying there for hours, and sleep seems as unapproachable as Everest.

Fortunately, you have a tool available to you at all times that can help you deal with this: meditation. The benefits of meditation are numerous (and there are many, many books out there that detail them), including everything from boosting immune function to decreasing anxiety to actually increasing your gray matter. One of those many benefits is helping with insomnia.

In a study performed by Dr. David S. Black and others, a group of older adults with sleep problems were introduced to mindfulness meditation through six two-hour sessions. By the end of these sessions, this group showed meaningful improvement with insomnia.[18]

If meditation seems foreign to you (and, if that's the case, you're in the vast majority, as less than 15 percent of Americans meditate),[19] it's likely because you've heard that meditation is difficult or that it requires you to completely blank your mind. Ariel Garten, creator of Muse, a headband that assists in meditation, clarifies that it isn't about emptying your mind, but rather, "training your mind to be aware in the present moment."[20]

She told me that you can choose any time and any place to meditate and that you can feel the benefits from it with as little as three minutes spent with eyes closed, taking deep breaths and then releasing those breaths, counting as you go. Another tool she advocates is focused attention, a super-simple process of placing all your attention on your breathing. When your mind wanders from your breathing (as it invariably will), just notice

this and bring it back. This technique promises to demystify meditation for anyone who thinks you need to be a Zen master to get anything out of it. Few of us are capable of locking our focus on one thing for an extended period, so it's good to know refocusing is equally valuable.

When you regain your attention on your breathing, Garten says, "you're exerting an important skill—you're learning to observe your thinking. You're not caught up in your thoughts, but you're in a process of observing that you're thinking. You begin to recognize that you can have control over your thoughts and that you can choose what you are thinking."[21]

Meditation can improve your sleep, even with these simple methods. My meditation coach, Emily Fletcher, author of *Stress Less, Accomplish More* has a unique process called Ziva Meditation. You can watch a full video of us going through her process by going to LimitlessBook.com/resources and we will walk you through it.

***KWIK START***

What is your top sleep tip? Write it down.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

Fueling your brain is fundamental to becoming limitless, and we have lots more to get to in order to make this happen. But first, let's stop and focus on a few things from this chapter:

- Put a shopping list together for all the brain foods you don't currently have in your home. I realize that not all of these foods are going to be compatible with your palate, but really try to include as many as you can. Then take this list with you to the store.
- Spend some time identifying your ANTs. What limitations are you placing on yourself? Give yourself a few minutes with this. What are you telling yourself you can't do? Write this down.
- Think about how you'd like to expand your learning. What have you always wanted to master that you haven't found the time to master? Is

it a different language? Computer coding? A new sales or marketing technique? What can you do to fit that into your life right now?

- Use one of the tools we talked about here to improve the amount and quality of your sleep. Keep track of this for at least a week.
- I made two videos for you on how to easily memorize the top 10 brain foods and my 10 brain energizing recommendations. Go to www.LimitlessBook.com/ resources to watch.



# 9

# SMALL SIMPLE STEPS

**What is the smallest simple step I can take now?**

**How do we start good habits or end bad ones?**

**What daily routine will help me become limitless?**

You have a reason or purpose to do something. You have the necessary energy to do it. What is missing?

A small simple step ($S^3$). The tiniest action you can take to get you closer to your goal. One that requires minimal effort or energy. Over time, these become habits. That's the reason I've filled this book with the small simple steps called Kwik Starts.

Back in the 1920s, a Russian psychologist, Bluma Zeigarnik, was sitting in a Viennese restaurant when she noticed that the waiters swirling around her in the busy eatery were highly efficient at remembering customer orders while they were in process but tended to forget who had what as soon as the orders were filled.

Intrigued by this, she ran a study where she had people perform simple tasks while they were sometimes interrupted. Afterward, she queried participants about which tasks they remembered and which they did not, finding that those who'd been interrupted were twice as likely to remember the things they'd been doing when they'd been interrupted than the things they'd been able to complete without interruption. She came to the conclusion—subsequently known as the Zeigarnik effect—that

uncompleted tasks created a level of tension that keeps that task at the front of our minds until it is completed.

In all likelihood, you're familiar with this tension from your experience with procrastination. When you have something you know you need to do and you keep putting it off, it weighs on you, even making it more difficult to do anything else well as long as this task goes uncompleted. What you need to do seems hard, or it seems like less fun than the other things you could be doing, or it's going to be uncomfortable, or you've simply convinced yourself that you have plenty of time to get to it later. We still struggle to complete tasks when we are clear on our vision for our lives and know who we want to become. Why is it still so hard to act, even when we have sustained motivation?

One of the most significant reasons that people fail to act is that we feel overwhelmed by what we need to do. A project or a chore might seem so big and time-consuming that you can't imagine how you're ever going to get it done. We look at the project in its entirety and immediately feel that the task at hand is too big, so we shut down or put it off. "Incomplete tasks and procrastinating often lead to frequent and unhelpful thought patterns," says psychologist Hadassah Lipszyc. "These thoughts can impact on sleep, trigger anxiety symptoms, and further impact on a person's mental and emotional resources."[1]

## BE KIND TO YOURSELF

If you struggle to get something done with some amount of regularity, there's a good chance that you feel guilty about this and you beat yourself up over it. It's likely you give yourself a much harder time about it than is helpful. We already know that unfinished tasks create tension in your brain. If you layer guilt and shame on top of this, you're making it even harder to get a task done, and you're making yourself miserable.

"Feeling guilty when you're away from work, when you aren't in a position to do anything about it, is not helpful, and can be painful," writes Dr. Art Markman, a professor of psychology and marketing at University of Texas, Austin. "It will make you feel worse about your job in general and spoil time that you could be spending with friends, family, or engaging in an enjoyable activity. Shame, though, is a different story. There is evidence

that people will explicitly procrastinate to avoid shame. Feeling shame about work you have not completed is likely to make the problem worse, not better, making it an emotion that is almost never helpful."[2]

Feeling bad about your lack of progress is likely to make it more difficult for you to stop procrastinating. So, give yourself a break. Beating yourself up isn't going to improve anything, and, since you're reading this book now, you're already taking steps to avoid procrastinating in the future.

In my experience, the best way to deal with this is to find a way to break the task into bite-size pieces, which lead to habits that lead toward success. Circling back to the Zeigarnik effect, every time you complete one of these smaller tasks, you get to take that weight off your mind. And as each of these subtasks is finished, you're that much closer to completing the task overall.

## TAKE BABY STEPS

Podcast guest Dr. B. J. Fogg, the founder and director of the Behavior Design Lab at Stanford University and the author of *Tiny Habits*, has been studying human behavior for more than two decades. What he's learned is that only three things can change a person's behavior long term. One is to have an epiphany, which very few people can summon on demand. Another is to change your environment, which is possible for nearly everyone, but not necessarily feasible at any given time. The third is to, as Dr. Fogg puts it, "take baby steps."[3]

I like the way this story illustrates the principle of small, simple steps:

> A King was watching a great magician perform his act. The crowd was enthralled and so was the King. At the end, the audience roared with approval. And the King said, "What a gift this man has. A God-given talent."
>
> But a wise counsellor said to the King, "My Lord, genius is made, not born. This magician's skill is the result of discipline and practice. These talents have been learned and honed over time with determination and discipline."
>
> The King was troubled by this message. The counsellor's challenge had spoiled his pleasure in the magician's arts. "Limited and spiteful

man. How dare you criticize a true genius. As I said, you either have it or you don't. And you most certainly don't."

The King turned to his bodyguard and said, "Throw this man into the deepest dungeon." And, he added for the counselor's benefit, "So you won't be lonely, you can have two of your kind to keep you company. You shall have two piglets as cellmates."

From the very first day of his imprisonment, the wise counselor practiced running up the steps of his cell to the prison door carrying in each hand a piglet. As the days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months, the piglets steadily grew into sturdy boars. And with every day of practice the wise counselor increased his power and strength.

One day the King remembered the wise counselor and was curious to see how imprisonment had humbled him. He had the wise counselor summoned.

When the prisoner appeared, he was a man of powerful physique, carrying a boar on each arm. The King exclaimed, "What a gift this man has. A God-given talent."

The wise counselor replied, "My Lord, genius is made, not born. My skill is the result of discipline and practice. These talents have been learned and honed over time with determination and discipline."[4]

One of the only things that is likely to change your behavior is to make incremental progress. You really don't want to make dinner? Make something simple for your family to snack on while you cook dinner later. You're having trouble writing that big speech for next month's conference? Just write the keynote to the speech now. You're overwhelmed by the amount of reading you need to do for your economics class? Set a goal for yourself of reading the first chapter. Like the wise counselor, you must take it one step at a time, one day at a time.

What you'll notice in all of these scenarios is two things. One is that they present you with something achievable—a win on the way to reaching the championship of getting this job done. The other is that they all put you in a situation where you're likely to get even more accomplished. You're already in the kitchen now, so you might as well finish making dinner. You've gotten through the keynote and you're on a roll, so maybe it makes sense to draft some more pages. The first chapter of your economics text

wasn’t nearly as dry as it seemed from the outside, and you already have the book open; you can handle a few more chapters.

By breaking a task that you’re procrastinating about into smaller pieces, the path to getting it done becomes clear.

The best way to deal with the tension between what you want and what you’ve done so far to achieve it is to remember what the Zeigarnik effect teaches us. You’re not going to be able to ease your mind about this task until you complete it, so get yourself moving toward completion. Start somewhere. Anywhere. Even if you don’t have the energy or the motivation to get the entire thing done, get started on getting it done. You’ll be thankful for the relief.

***KWIK START***

Think about an important task you’ve been putting off. What is it? How can you break it down into simpler steps that you can do each day?

## ON AUTOPILOT

Small simple steps repeated lead to habits. Our habits are a core part of who we are. Various studies have shown that somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of what we do every day is the product of a habit. That means that half of our lives is governed by what scientists term *automaticity.* This percentage might sound high to you—it certainly did to me the first time I heard it—but consider how many things you do every day without really thinking about them. You brush your teeth without thinking about it. You check your phone at predictable intervals. You drive to the office and don’t particularly recall how you got there. You zip up your jacket, get a glass out of the cupboard, and click on the TV remote automatically.

"As you step into your limitless self, you might be confronted with old habits and patterns that are not necessarily based in truth. These old ways of being show up because you have repeated many of them thousands of times."



—DEBBIE FORD

This, of course, is essential to how we conduct our lives. Could you imagine how overwhelming it would be if you had to think about *every single thing* you did? If even brushing your teeth required some conscious level of calculation, you'd be exhausted by 10 in the morning.

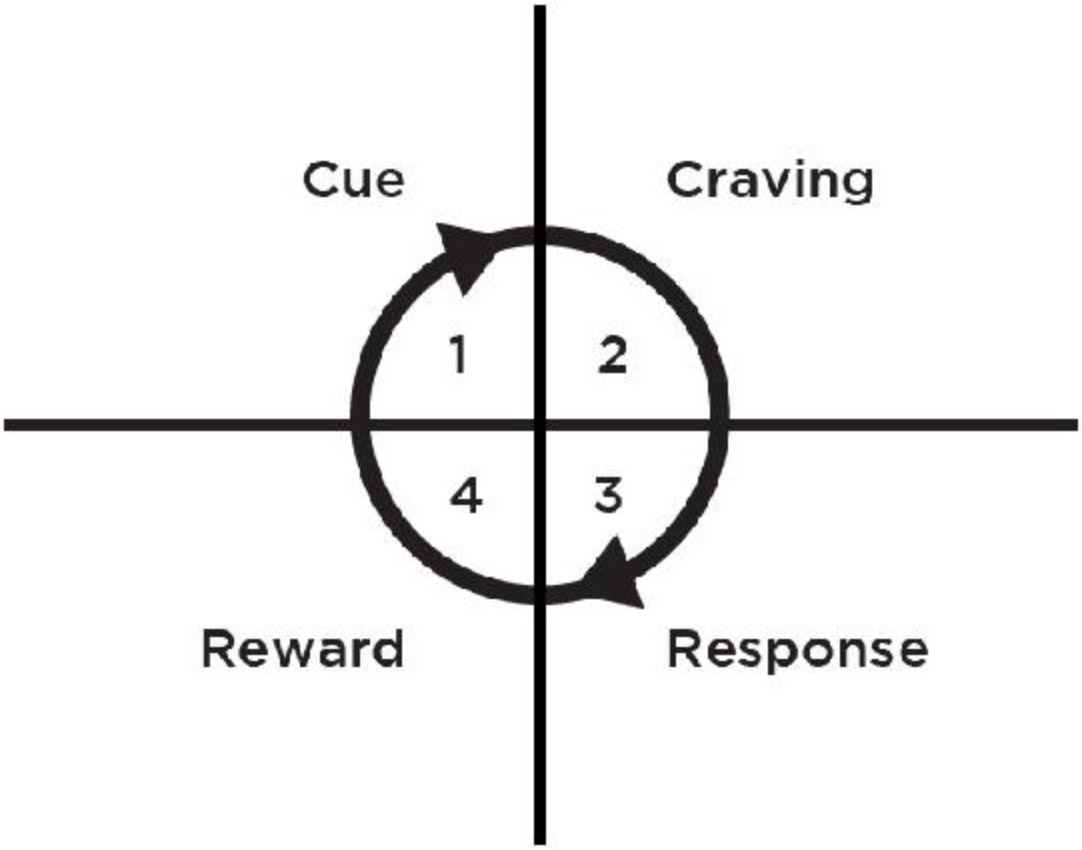
"Without habit loops, our brains would shut down, overwhelmed by the minutiae of daily life," writes Charles Duhigg in his best-selling book, *The Power of Habit.* "People whose basal ganglia are damaged by injury or disease often become mentally paralyzed. They have trouble performing basic activities, such as opening a door or deciding what to eat. They lose the ability to ignore insignificant details—one study, for example, found that patients with basal ganglia injuries couldn't recognize facial expressions, including fear and disgust, because they were perpetually uncertain about which part of the face to focus on."[5]

James Clear, author of the best-selling book *Atomic Habits*, says, "The habits you repeat (or don't repeat) every day largely determine your health, wealth, and happiness. Knowing how to change your habits means knowing how to confidently own and manage your days, focus on the behaviors that have the highest impact, and reverse-engineer the life you want."[6]

"All habits serve you in some way," Clear told me. "As you go through life, you face a variety of problems. You need to tie your shoe; your brain is automating the solution to that problem. That's what a habit is. It's the solution to a recurring problem that you face throughout life, one that you've employed so many times that you can do it without thinking. If the solution doesn't work anymore, then your brain will update it."[7]

Clear identifies the habit loop as having four components: a cue, a craving, a response, and a reward. Using the example of turning on a light when you enter a room, the cue is walking into the room and finding it dark. The craving is feeling that there would be some value in the room not being dark. The response is flipping on the light switch, and the reward is that the room is no longer dark.[8] You can apply this loop to any of your habits, such as getting your mail when you come home from work. The cue is reaching your driveway or front door at the end of the day. The craving is hoping there's something in the mailbox. The response is going to the mailbox to find out. And the reward is getting the mail out of your mailbox. You probably didn't think about any of this until you actually had the mail in your hands.

**The Habit Loop**




Creating habits to automate essential parts of our lives is a fundamental streamlining technique that we do largely unconsciously, often to our benefit. Of course, we also automate all kinds of things that we'd probably be much better off not turning into habits. I'm sure you know some version of this. Perhaps a cue is walking past your kitchen pantry. The craving comes from the knowledge that your favorite chips are in the pantry, and your innate desire to eat them. The response is that you go into the pantry, open the bag of chips, and take out a big handful. And the reward is crunchy, salty, fatty deliciousness . . . that doesn't benefit your health in any way. Our negative habits operate with the same level of automaticity as our healthy ones. Those chips are in your stomach before you've even had the opportunity to register that you were stuffing them in your mouth.

Now, because you're in the process of becoming limitless, you know that perpetuating negative behaviors is a drain on your superpowers. So, how do

you break bad habits and, just as importantly, how do you create new habits that will help you?

## GETTING IN THE HABIT

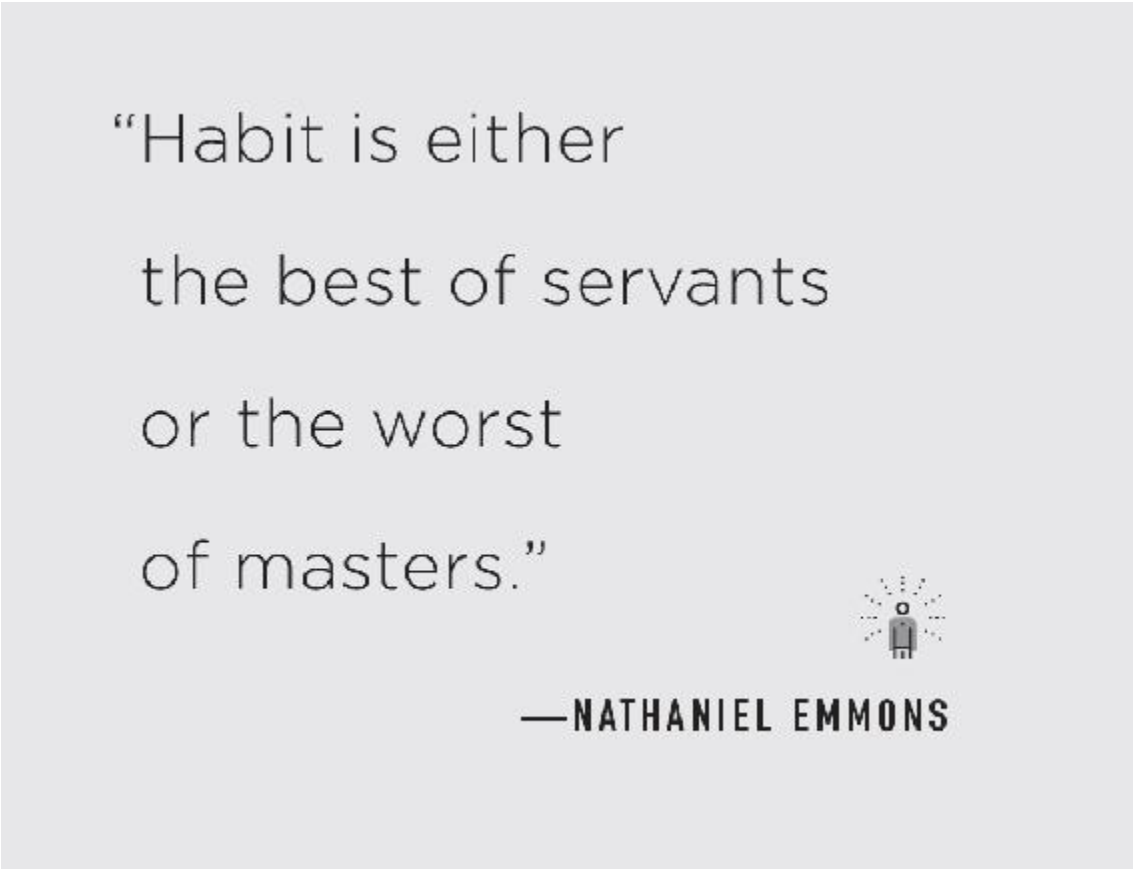
Before we get to this, let's talk for a moment about how long it takes to form a habit. In a study for University College London, Phillippa Lally, Cornelia H. M. van Jaarsveld, Henry W. W. Potts, and Jane Wardle took participants through the process of developing a new healthy eating, drinking, or exercise habit, such as drinking water with lunch or jogging before dinner. They were asked to perform this new behavior based on specific situational cues every day for 84 days. "For the majority of participants," they wrote, "automaticity increased steadily over the days of the study, supporting the assumption that repeating a behavior in a consistent setting increases automaticity." By the end of the study, they'd found that it took an average of 66 days for the new behavior to become a habit, though it took individual participants as little as 18 days and as many as 254.[9]

It is also widely assumed that breaking a bad habit isn't about ending that habit, but rather about replacing it with a different, more constructive, habit. Dr. Elliot Berkman, director of the Social and Affective Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Oregon, notes, "It's much easier to start doing something new than to stop doing something habitual without a replacement behavior. That's one reason why smoking cessation aids such as nicotine gum or inhalers tend to be more effective than the nicotine patch."[10]

So, if the process of starting a new habit, such as setting aside time to read every day, is fundamentally the same as the process of ending a negative habit, such as grabbing those chips every time you pass the pantry, how does it work?

As with so many of the things we've discussed in this book, motivation plays a key role. Speaking specifically about the effort to break habits, Dr. Thomas G. Plante, adjunct clinical professor of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine, said, "It depends on how much you really want to break the habit. Many people are ambivalent. They want to lose weight, but they like

the foods they eat. They want to reduce their alcohol consumption but love their happy hour. They want to stop picking their nails, but it reduces stress for them. So, one important issue is how strongly you really want to break the habit in question. Second, how established is the problem habit? It is easier to break a new habit than an old one. Third, what are the consequences of not breaking the habit? Will a partner leave you? Will you lose a job? Will you get sick? Will something really bad happen if you don't change?"[11]



Dr. B. J. Fogg created the Fogg Behavior Model to identify the circumstances that need to be present for behavior change to occur. “For a target behavior to happen,” he notes, “a person must have sufficient motivation, sufficient ability, and an effective prompt. All three factors must be present at the same instant for the behavior to occur.”[12] In other words, you need three things in place in order to develop a habit: You need the desire to do it, since it is exceedingly difficult to make habitual anything you really don’t want to do; you need the skills to do it, since it’s nearly impossible to make a habit out of anything you don’t have the capacity to accomplish; and you need something to get the habit loop started (what James Clear and others refer to as “the cue”). Let’s look at each element in turn:

## Motivation

We’ve talked about motivation already, but it’s worth revisiting the subject here to see it from Fogg’s perspective. Fogg identifies three key motivators:

1. **Pleasure/pain:** This is the most immediate motivator. In this case, the behavior has a nearly immediate payoff, positive or negative. “I believe pleasure/pain is a primitive response,” says Fogg, “and it functions adaptively in hunger, sex, and other activities related to self-preservation and propagation of our genes.”[13]
2. **Hope/fear:** Unlike the immediacy of the previous motivator, this one is all about anticipation. When you’re hopeful, you’re anticipating something good happening; when you’re fearful, you’re anticipating the opposite. “This dimension is at times more powerful than pleasure/pain, as is evidenced in everyday behavior,” Fogg notes. “For example, in some situations, people will accept pain (a flu shot) in order to overcome fear (anticipation of getting the flu).[14]
3. **Social acceptance/rejection:** Humans have always desired to be accepted by their peers, dating back to the time when being ostracized could mean a death sentence, and this remains an extremely strong motivator. “The power of social motivation is likely hardwired into us and perhaps all other creatures that historically depended on living in groups to survive.”[15]

## Ability

Fogg equates ability with simplicity, noting that when something is simple for us, we are considerably more likely to do it. He defines six categories of simplicity:

1. **Time:** We only perceive something to be simple if we have the time available to perform the function.
2. **Money:** Similarly, if something stretches our financial resources, we do not consider it simple.
3. **Physical effort:** We consider things that are physically easy for us to be simple.
4. **Brain cycles:** Simple things don't tax our thinking, and we shy away from things that require us to think too hard.
5. **Social deviance:** This goes back to the acceptance motivation. A simple act fits into societal norms.
6. **Nonroutine:** How far something is out of one's normal routine will define its level of simplicity.

## Prompts

Finally, Fogg notes three types of prompts:

1. **Spark:** A spark is a type of prompt that immediately leads to a form of motivation. For example, if opening your e-mail leads to a level of fear over what you might find there, you're likely to adopt a habit that will change that fear.
2. **Facilitator:** This type of prompt works when motivation is high, but ability is low. For example, if you want to use a certain kind of software on your computer but are tech-averse, a tool that makes that software easier for you to use is likely to cause you to adopt this behavior.
3. **Signal :** In some cases, you'll have both high motivation and high ability. The only other thing you need to make a behavior a habit is some kind of reminder or signal. If you love making brain smoothies,

all you need is to walk into your kitchen in the morning and see the blender to prompt you to make one.

***KWIK START***

Can you identify the habits you want to break? What is that one habit that's holding you back from doing other important things in your day? Write it down, then identify the prompts that trigger you to perform that habit.

## CREATING A NEW HABIT

The Fogg Behavior Model shows us everything that needs to be in place for a particular behavior to become a habit. We know that making habits of behaviors we consider good for us is important to our growth, and we also know that the key to breaking bad habits is to replace them with more constructive ones. But how do you make something a habit? Just remember WIN:

- **W is for Want:** Make sure you really want it. It's nearly impossible to turn something into a habit if you don't want to do that thing. Does one of the motivators in the Fogg Model apply to the habit you're trying to adopt? If not, is there something close to this habit that might accomplish something similar for you?
- **I is for Innate:** Does the new habit you're trying to adopt align well with your innate abilities? Remember that you're unlikely to make something a habit when it is consistently difficult for you to perform. If the habit you're trying to adopt is something that you're good at or you know you can be good at, you're well on your way.
- **N is for Now:** Create a prompt for yourself that encourages you to perform the new habit now. This can be anything from a reminder on your phone to placing something in your office that makes you remember to set aside time to do what you're setting out to do.

# GROWING YOUR LIFE ONE HABIT AT A TIME

In case you're still wondering how much of an effect establishing good habits can have on your life, let me share a story about one of our clients. Xiang suffered from schizophrenia and depression. He often heard voices telling him to hurt himself or others, and he endured several stints in psychiatric wards because of this. After finding the right medication and emerging from his latest round of treatment, he discovered my podcast and learned some of the tactics that I teach in my school. He started listening on a regular basis and participated in the Kwik Challenge, a series of exercises I take people through to introduce novelty to their thinking and therefore keep their brains tuned for learning.

At first, this was hard for Xiang, but he focused on doing just two particular challenges: brushing his teeth with his opposite hand and taking a cold shower every morning. He increased his time under the cold water by one minute each week and, in doing so, discovered that being able to do something hard, like standing under freezing cold water for several minutes each morning, made him realize that there were areas in his life in which he was fighting for his limitations. Building from these Kwik Challenge experiences, he started applying what he was learning about habits and behavior change to other areas.

Xiang's life improved dramatically. He took his driver's license test and passed. He changed his diet, cut out sugary drinks, and started taking a five-minute jog in the park every morning. He started reading books—the first being *Mindset* by Carol Dweck—and as he read, he listened to baroque music to pace his reading and distract himself from hallucinations. It took him a month to finish the book, but when he did, he felt a sense of confidence he had never had before. Trips to the library became a regular thing. Xiang has even taken his learning to the next level and enrolled in computer science classes at a local college. And the best part is that he now believes he is a lifelong learner.

You may think that because of all your past failed attempts to change your habits and routines you're doomed to failure forever. Xiang's story shows that by changing just one or two small habits in your day, incredible progress can follow. Something as simple as brushing your teeth with the opposite hand can be the start to an entirely new way of life.

# ESTABLISHING A MORNING ROUTINE

Why is your morning routine so important? I strongly believe that if you jump-start your day by jump-starting your brain with a series of simple activities, you have a huge advantage. In addition, if you set up winning routines early in the day, you can benefit from what Tony Robbins calls “the science of momentum”: the notion that once you set accomplishment in motion, you can keep it in motion with much less effort than if you were trying to accomplish something from a standing start.

I have a carefully developed morning routine to help me win the day that involves priming my mind. I don’t do every single one of these things every day, especially when I’m traveling, but I always do most of them, and I know for certain that it gets me mentally prepared and poised for performance, productivity, and positivity from the minute I get up.

Let me walk you through a typical morning.

Before I even get out of bed, I spend some time reflecting on my dreams. Dreams are an expression of the work your subconscious is doing while you’re sleeping, and there’s gold to be mined from them. Many geniuses throughout history have regularly accessed and often gleaned their best ideas and made their greatest discoveries from their dreams. Mary Shelley came up with the idea for *Frankenstein* in her dreams. A dream was the source of Paul McCartney’s “Yesterday,” and Einstein’s theory of relativity.

So, the first thing I do every morning, even before lifting my head from the pillow, is think back on my dreams to see if there’s an idea or a perception or a new way of looking at something that can be useful to what I’m trying to accomplish. I know that some of you have trouble recalling your dreams, so I’m going to provide you with a quick mnemonic technique designed to help you do so. Just think of the word DREAMS:

- **D is for Decide:** The night before, make a conscious decision that you’re going to recall your dreams. If you set the intention, your chances improve dramatically.
- **R is for Record:** Keep a pen and paper by your bedside, or even have a recording app readily available on your phone. As soon as you wake up, record any lingering remembrance of your dreams.

- **E is for Eyes:** Keep your eyes closed right after you awaken. Dreams can disappear within minutes, and if you keep your eyes closed, this will help you reflect.
- **A is for Affirm:** Before you go to sleep, affirm that you are going to remember your dreams, because affirmation is a critical tool in accomplishment.
- **M is for Manage:** For lots of reasons but specifically here for the sake of remembering your dreams, it's important to manage your sleep and establish good sleep routines.
- **S is for Share:** Talk about your dreams with others. When you do so, you bring them more and more to the surface, and you develop the routine of tapping into your dreams so you can discuss them later.

The first thing I do after I get out of bed is make the bed. This is a success habit, my first accomplishment of the day. It's an easy win, and it has the added advantage of making my bedtime more pleasant, because it's always nicer to return that night to a bed that is made. It's why, in the military, they train you to make your bed first thing in the morning, because it sets you up to be excellent at everything you do.

After that, I have a tall glass of water. Hydration is so important first thing in the morning because our bodies lose a lot of water while we sleep through the simple act of breathing. Remember: Our brains are approximately 75 percent water, so if we're going to fire up our brains, we need to be well hydrated. I also have a glass of celery juice, which boosts the immune system, helps flush toxins from the liver, and helps restore the adrenal glands (hat tip to Anthony William, the Medical Medium, for this idea). Right after this, I'll take my probiotics to make sure my second brain is getting what it needs.

Then I brush my teeth with my opposite hand. I do this to train my brain to do difficult things, because it stimulates a different part of your brain, and because it forces me to be present. I can't be doing other things in order to do this well.

Then I do a three-minute workout. This is not my full workout, but I want to get my heart rate up first thing in the morning, as it helps with sleep and weight management, and with oxygenation to the brain.

Once I’m finished with that, I take a cold shower. I’m sure some of you will cringe at the idea of starting the day pummeling yourself with cold water, but cold therapies of this type do a great job of resetting the nervous system and have the added benefit of helping manage any inflammation.

When I’m out of the shower, I go through a series of breathing exercises to fully oxygenate my body. Then I do about 20 minutes of meditation to give me a clear mind as I enter the day. The process I use, Ziva Meditation, was developed by my meditation coach, Emily Fletcher, a three-step process that involves mindfulness, meditation, and manifestation. To watch a video of it, go to www.LimitlessBook.com/resources.

Next, I make my “brain tea,” a combination of gotu kola, ginkgo, lion’s mane, MCT oil, and a few other things. Then I’ll sit down to spend some time journaling, getting my first thoughts of the day down on the page. My goal in any given day is to accomplish three things for work and three things personally, and I set this agenda now. I follow this with about a half hour of reading. I set a goal to read a minimum of one book a week and making this a part of my morning routine to keep me on course.

Finally, I drink my “brain smoothie,” a combination of many of the brain foods we discussed earlier in this chapter (no salmon here, in case you were wondering).

Now, admittedly, this routine requires a good deal of time. As I mentioned, I can’t get to all of it every day, and I can appreciate if it seems like more than you can handle, particularly if you need to get others started on their day. But if your goal in reading this book is upgrading your brain, then some variation on a morning routine of this type is an integral part of the process. Here are the keys:

- Check in on your dreams before you get out of bed. There’s so much gold to mine here, so I strongly recommend that you not skip this step.
- Get yourself hydrated and oxygenated.
- Nourish yourself with some of the brain foods mentioned in this chapter.
- Set a plan for the day.

If you do at least these four things, you’ll be well on your way to revving up your brain to operate at a high-octane level. Build as many of these

things into the start of your day as you can. The most important thing is having a productive morning routine. I can't stress enough how much of an impact getting your day off to the right start has on how the day goes for you overall.

***KWIK START***

Create your new morning routine. Remember, it doesn't have to be a lot. Even a simple three-step routine can help jump-start your morning. What are the three things you will always do when you first wake up to set up your day to win? Write them down.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

None of us would be able to live without habits, of course, but consciously working to bring constructive new habits into your life and to replace bad habits with better ones will take your superpowers to a new level. Before you move on to the next chapter, here are a few things to do:

- Bolster your understanding of the habit loop by thinking about the four components of some of your most common habits, like making your breakfast or taking the dog for a walk. What's the cue, the craving, the response, and the reward for each of these?
- Spend a few minutes thinking about a habit that you'd love to replace with a more constructive one. Using the Fogg Behavioral Model, what new behavior can you adopt that fits neatly into the model?
- Walk yourself through the process of starting a valuable new habit using WIN.

"To put it another way:

flow is the

telephone booth

where Clark Kent

changes clothes,

the place from

where Superman

emerges."



—STEVEN KOTLER

# 10

# FLOW

**Why is flow so important to becoming limitless?**

**How do I achieve a flow state?**

**What are the key enemies of flow?**

I'm sure there have been times when you were so completely caught up in what you were doing that everything else disappeared and it just felt like the most natural thing you've ever done. Time probably melted away for you during these experiences. People regularly tell me about focusing so deeply on what they were doing that they had no idea that afternoon had become night or that they'd missed multiple meals in the process.

This experience is flow.

In his groundbreaking book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes *flow* as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it." To Csikszentmihalyi, flow is an expression of "optimal experience."[1]

Dr. Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as having eight characteristics:[2]

1. Absolute concentration
2. Total focus on goals
3. The sense that time is either speeding up or slowing down

4. A feeling of reward from the experience
5. A sense of effortlessness
6. The experience is challenging, but not overly so
7. Your actions almost seem to be happening on their own
8. You feel comfort with what you are doing

As you've likely experienced yourself, being in a flow state dramatically boosts your productivity. Reports have suggested that flow can make you as much as five times more productive. The people at McKinsey have even imagined a workforce where flow is commonplace:

> When we ask executives during the peak-performance exercise how much more productive they were at their peak than they were on average, for example, we get a range of answers, but the most common at senior levels is an increase of five times. Most report that they and their employees are in the zone at work less than 10 percent of the time, though some claim to experience these feelings as much as 50 percent of it. If employees working in a high-IQ, high-EQ, and high-MQ environment are five times more productive at their peak than they are on average, consider what even a relatively modest 20-percentage-point increase in peak time would yield in overall workplace productivity —it would almost double.[3]

## WINNING WITH FLOW

Patrick, a member of our community, struggled constantly with ADHD and an inability to focus. It had been a problem for him throughout his life. He was easily distracted, or, in the reverse, he was hyperfocused to the detriment of everything and everyone around him. He even experienced this during his Brazilian jujitsu tournaments. He had difficulty deciding which technique to use with opponents and felt as though he was trying to use every move at once, even though many of them weren't appropriate for the situation. His inability to focus affected his work, his family life, and his favorite sport, and he felt a high level of stress nearly all the time.

Then one day he started listening to episodes of my podcast, where he heard about the stages of flow (which we will get to in a moment), as well as several other high-performance habits. Patrick applied what he was learning to his everyday life and saw immediate results. He was finally able to identify and understand what he was struggling with, and he immersed himself in his pursuits more fully than ever before. Finding flow was the key.

In his next tournament, Patrick was able to release his intense focus and take his mind off the problems that had distracted him in the past. He found his flow quickly . . . and felt like he was in *The Matrix*; he could see his opponent's moves coming before they happened. Even better, he was able to find flow in other areas of his life too. The better he did in his martial arts tournaments, the better he did in life. Patrick finally felt a release from the stress that dogged him endlessly, at last believing that he could let go and enjoy his life more.

# THE FOUR STAGES OF FLOW

The flow state has a predictable arc to it. Our podcast guest, Steven Kotler, founder of the Flow Research Collective and the author of *The Rise of Superman,* has identified the four stages of flow:[4]

## Stage 1: Struggle

This is when you're digging deep to access whatever it is that you need to reach the flow state. It could be a workout regimen, extensive research, an intense bout of brainstorming, or anything else that you are focusing on. Warning: This often feels like a struggle and, in fact, the opposite of flow.

## Stage 2: Relaxation

This is the break you take before fully diving into flow. It is an essential step, as it keeps you from burning out over the struggle you've just been through. This break—a walk, some breathing, anything that helps you relax—is decidedly different from a distraction such as moving on to another task or checking sports scores.

### Stage 3: Flow

This is the stage that Kotler describes as “the superman experience.” This is that flow state that hopefully you’ve experienced at various points in your life, where you’re doing your absolute best work and it almost seems to be happening automatically.

### Stage 4: Consolidation

In this final stage you pull together everything you accomplished during the flow stage. Often, this is accompanied by feeling somewhat let down. All kinds of positive chemicals have been running through your brain while you’re in flow, and now that high is ending. But another cycle can be waiting just around the corner.

Kotler believes that finding flow is the “source code” of motivation. When you find flow, you get “maybe the most potent dose of reward chemistry” your brain can give you—which is the reason he believes flow is the most addictive state on Earth. Once we start to feel flow in an experience, we are motivated to do what it takes to get more. But it’s a circular relationship—if you have motivation to accomplish a task but you have no flow, you will eventually burn out. Motivation and flow need to work together, and they must be coupled with a solid recovery protocol, like good sleep and nutrition.

***KWIK START***

Have you ever experienced the flow state? Where were you? What were you doing? How did it feel? What did you achieve at the end of it? Visualize that state. Even if you can’t visualize, imagine that you can.

## FINDING FLOW

If you’re going to become limitless, you’re going to want to get yourself into a flow state as often as possible. So how do you do this? I can offer five ways:

## 1. Eliminate Distractions

Earlier, we talked about the importance of keeping distractions to a minimum. If you're going to find yourself in a flow state, eliminating distractions is absolutely essential. It can take you up to 20 minutes to reconnect with what you're doing after you've been distracted from doing it. How are you ever going to get into the flow if you're constantly rebooting because a text drew away your attention, or because you just wanted to make a quick check of social media before you got back to work? So, put everything else aside and concentrate completely on what you're doing.

## 2. Give Yourself Enough Time

Make sure you have a block of time set aside to get into flow. It's commonly believed that, when conditions are right, it takes about 15 minutes to achieve a flow state and that you don't really hit your peak for closer to 45 minutes. Clearing out only half an hour or so isn't going to allow you to accomplish much. Plan to set aside at least 90 minutes, and ideally a full two hours.

## 3. Do Something You Love

When we think of flow, we tend to think of people achieving at extremely high levels: the athlete perfecting her game, the musician crafting the ideal guitar solo, the writer quickly putting words down on the page as though taking dictation rather than creating. What's common among all of these people is that they are doing something that matters to them a great deal. They wouldn't be satisfied with only being moderately competent, as they aren't performing a task with which they have a casual relationship. They're doing things they love.

I've been talking to people about flow for decades, and I don't think I've ever heard someone mention being in a flow state about something they were doing only to pass the time. It's like the difference between driving an old junker and driving a brand-new Aston Martin. Both might get you to the office, but you're only likely to really get into the driving experience with one of them. If you find certain annoyances in something you're doing, or if you find it to be dull much of the time, these negatives are going to prevent you from truly getting into the flow.

### 4. Have Clear Goals

One of the most efficient flow preventers is a lack of clarity. If you don't know what you're trying to accomplish, it's likely that casting around for a mission will keep flow at bay. A novelist friend of mine separates the plotting of his novels from the actual writing for precisely this reason. For him, plotting is an arduous task with lots of fits and starts, whereas he takes tremendous pleasure in choosing the right words for his stories and making his characters come alive. By plotting ahead of time, he knows exactly what he's going to write about on any given day and regularly finds himself disappearing into the flow of his work for hours at a stretch.

So, once you've carved out the time, give yourself a clear purpose for how you are going to use that time. If you set yourself on a mission at the outset, and it is something that you're excited about achieving, you're likely to find yourself deeply immersed in that mission.

### 5. Challenge Yourself . . . A Little

When I talk to people about flow, I consistently hear that they are most likely to achieve flow when they're doing something that is *a little bit* of a challenge. In other words, they're outside of their comfort zone, but not way outside of it. The logic here is clear. If you do something that you can do with both hands tied behind your back, you're probably going to become bored fairly quickly, and boredom and flow are incompatible.

On the other hand, if you do something that you find extremely difficult, you're likely to become frustrated, and that frustration is going to keep flow from happening. But if you do something that you love that also has a moderate level of challenge to it—trying to hit a baseball to just one part of the field, trying a new form of tuning on your guitar, or writing from the perspective of a new character, for example—this level of challenge is likely to keep the task exciting for you and therefore engage you deeply.

## CONQUERING THE ENEMIES OF FLOW

Training yourself to achieve flow regularly and even in multiple sessions in the same day will have you performing like a superhero. But we all know that superheroes are constantly challenged by supervillains, and a number of them are lurking around every corner, stalking your flow and trying to

extinguish it. Here are the four supervillains you need to keep at bay if your flow is going to thrive:

### 1. Multitasking

We've talked about this before, even in this chapter, but it bears repeating. Being a "master multitasker" is not synonymous with being limitless. In fact, research repeatedly shows that people who multitask are considerably less productive than those who focus on one task at a time. Given what you now know about flow, it should be obvious that multitasking is the mortal enemy of this feeling. You're never going get into the flow state to craft that epic solo or create that jaw-dropping presentation if you're also checking in with colleagues, sending off a quick note to a friend, and reading your company e-mail. The only way to vanquish the supervillain Multitask is to ignore him completely. Clear your schedule of everything else and get into the flow.

### 2. Stress

This is a particularly deadly supervillain and one that sometimes requires a monumental battle to defeat. If you have lots of outside stressors in your life—deadlines, relationship issues, family problems, worries about your job security, etc.—they're likely to sneak up on you at any given moment. I'm sure you've had the experience of thinking about something entirely different when you're suddenly ambushed by an anxious reminder that you're facing some troubles at home. Once that thought is in your head, any opportunities for flow are crushed. Defeating this supervillain requires two expert moves. The first is to look the supervillain in the eye before you start and ask yourself if there's anything that you *absolutely must* deal with before you can get into flow. If the answer is yes, address that first. But in all likelihood, the answer will be no. It isn't that the stressors aren't real, but they often don't need your immediate attention, and they aren't going to be worse two hours from now. If that's the case, contend with this supervillain by putting up your force field. Make your space impenetrable by outside stressors so you can concentrate completely on the task at hand.

### 3. Fear of Failure

“Perfectionism reduces creativity and innovation,” writes Hara Estroff Marano, editor at large and the former editor in chief of *Psychology Today*. “It is a steady source of negative emotions; rather than reaching toward something positive, those in its grip are focused on the very thing they most want to avoid—negative evaluation. Perfectionism, then, is an endless report card; it keeps people completely self-absorbed, engaged in perpetual self-evaluation—reaping relentless frustration and doomed to anxiety and depression.”[5] If you go into a task with the belief that you absolutely must perform this task perfectly and that failure will be devastating, you’re going to be so focused on not failing that you’ll never get into a state where you can truly excel.

Remember earlier when we talked about how one of the ideal conditions for flow is pushing yourself just a little outside of your comfort zone? When you do this, you increase the odds that you’re not going to get everything right the first time. If you allow the supervillain of perfectionism to master you at this point, your flow will be forfeited. To best this villain, you need to convince yourself that lack of perfection is not only okay but is a clear sign that you’re pushing yourself in ways that you must.

### 4. Lack of Conviction

Nearly as devilish a supervillain as perfectionism is a lack of belief in what you’re doing. “The brain perceives uncertainty as a threat, which sparks the release of cortisol, a stress hormone that disrupts memory, depresses the immune system, and increases the risk of high blood pressure and depression,” writes Travis Bradberry, president of TalentSmart.[6]

If you don’t believe you’re going to accomplish anything of importance, you’ll guarantee that will be the outcome. If you go into a task doubting your ability to complete it, ask yourself these questions: Do I have the necessary skills to do this? Do I have all the information I need to do this? Do I have enough passion for this project to do this? If the answer to any of these is no, set the task aside until you can answer each of these questions in the affirmative. But if the answer to all three of these questions is yes, take this supervillain down and get into the flow.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

The flow experience is one of the greatest highs any of us will ever experience. It is also fundamental to becoming limitless. By this point, you should have a better sense of what flow is and how to get there. Before we move on, take a little time to try out the following:

- Reflect on a few times you've been in the flow. What were you doing? What was consistent about those experiences? How can you get back there more often?
- Take out your calendar and find a spot in the next few days where you can carve out 90 minutes to two hours. This needs to be a time when you can free yourself of all distractions. Now, what are you going to do with that time to dramatically boost your productivity?
- How often do you go into a project with one of the supervillains we talked about in this chapter stalking you? What can you do *right now* to defeat that supervillain before going into your next project?

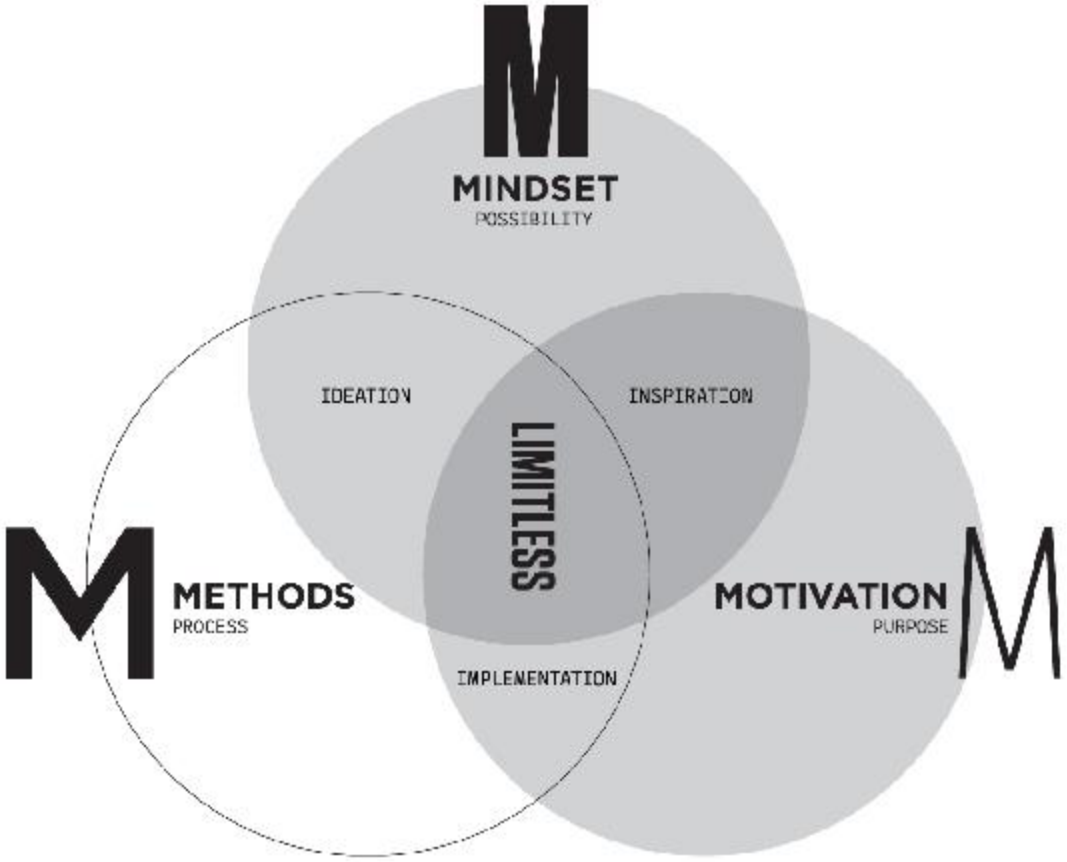
"The illiterate of the
21st century will
not be those who
cannot read and write,
but those who
cannot learn, unlearn,
and relearn."



—ALVIN TOFFLER

# PART IV

# LIMITLESS METHODS
## THE HOW




**method**

meth·od *(noun)*

A specific process for accomplishing something, especially an orderly, logical, or systematic way of instruction.

By this point, you've discovered how to unleash two of the elements necessary to become limitless. You've learned how to approach every day with a productive mindset, and you've learned how to do so with an optimal level of motivation. But there's one more *M* that differentiates limitless people from those who are encumbered by their limitations: method.

Methods are the procedures or processes for accomplishing something. In this context, method is the process of learning how to learn, also called meta learning. When we go through the education system, we are taught very antiquated and inefficient ways of learning, such as sub-vocalization and rote memorization. As I mentioned at the start of this book, when I was struggling as "the boy with the broken brain," I wasn't incapable of learning; history has shown that. But I wasn't succeeding at learning in the way I was being taught. It wasn't until I mastered a new way of learning—a method you will see over the course of the coming chapters—that I could finally use my brain to excel.

In this section, you're going to learn the science of accelerated learning and meta learning in five areas: focus, study, memory, speed reading, and thinking. These are the five flagship programs that we teach to individuals and organizations at Kwik Learning. Take special note of the lead-in questions at the start of these chapters, and make sure to try out all the exercises I've included. Once you start using these tools, I think you'll find yourself using them all the time—and I think you'll be amazed at what they unlock for you.



"Whenever you want
to achieve something,
keep your eyes open,
concentrate, and
make sure you know
exactly what it is
you want. No one can
hit their target with
their eyes closed."



—PAULO COELHO

# 11

# FOCUS

**What can I learn from what I'm like when I'm most focused?**

**How can I increase my ability to concentrate?**

**How do I limit my distractions and calm my busy mind?**

What's the difference between someone performing at superhero levels and someone failing to ever discover their superpowers? In many cases, it's a matter of focus. I'm sure you've had numerous times in your life when you've really locked in on a task. Maybe it was writing a report that mattered a great deal to you. Maybe it was having a session with a mentor you love. Maybe it was attacking a bowl of your favorite ice cream. How did you do with these tasks? In all likelihood, you crushed them, writing one of the best reports of your life, learning huge amounts from your mentor, and devouring that ice cream like it was the last dessert in the world. This happened because you were able to train your focus on the task at hand, get right on that task, and not let anything distract you from that task. So why do most of us have only so much ability to maintain focus? Simply, I think it's because we were never taught to do so. Certainly, I don't recall having a focus class when I was in elementary school.

Do you remember when you were a kid and you went outside on a sunny day with a magnifying glass? How cool was it to hover the glass over a leaf, see an intensely bright spot appear on the leaf, and then watch as the leaf started to smoke and burn? What you were able to do was focus a greater level of the sun's intensity on that leaf. And where the bright spot appeared,

things were at their hottest. Interestingly, when we talk about someone being intelligent, we often call them “bright.” Going back to our magnifying glass analogy, maybe what we’re really saying isn’t that this person is much more intelligent than most other people; maybe that person is just more focused.

Focus allows us to train our brain power on a particular task to burn through that task. It’s amazing what we can accomplish when we’re focused. Conversely, when we’re less focused, we’re less likely to accomplish what we truly want to do because we’re just not as committed —both emotionally and physically—to doing it. The primary enemy to focus is distraction.

***KWIK START***

Rate your current level of concentration from 0 to 10. Now rate your desire to increase this level. Your concentration is like a muscle. You can train to become stronger with practice.

## PRACTICING CONCENTRATION

“Concentration is at the crux of all human success and endeavor,” Hindu priest, entrepreneur, and former monk Dandapani told me during one of my podcasts. “If you can’t concentrate, you can’t manifest.”[1] What Dandapani is saying is that concentration is a critical component of anything you want to accomplish. But, like so many other things we’ve discussed already, we’ve never really been taught *how* to concentrate. Sure, our parents and our teachers might have implored us to concentrate harder, maybe even criticizing our lack of focus with a question such as, “Why can’t you just concentrate?” But the simple answer to that is that most of us never learned how.

Dandapani points out that concentration is like a muscle that gets stronger the more you exercise it. “Concentration is something you can learn and something you can practice to get better at,” he said.[2] However, what most of us practice instead is distraction. We allow our minds to jump from thought to thought, often using technology to help us practice

distraction until we're experts at it—and we should be, because we often get a dozen or more hours of practice a day. Just imagine what it would be like if we practiced concentration for even a fraction of that time.

Dandapani has a remarkably clear way of looking at this. "I define concentration as my ability to keep my awareness on one thing for an extended period of time. Every time my concentration drifts, I use my will power to bring my awareness back."[3]

Most of us think of lack of concentration as a function of our mind bouncing from place to place. Dandapani has a different—and more helpful—metaphor. To him, it isn't your mind that's moving; it's your awareness. He sees awareness as a glowing ball of light that moves to different parts of your mind. In order to excel at concentration, you need to make yourself keep that ball of light trained on one spot in your mind for an extended period. This won't be easy at first, but a conscious effort to exercise your will power in this way is likely to lead to impressive results.

You can work on this during nearly any pursuit. If you're having a conversation with someone, make a concerted effort to pay attention to nothing other than that conversation. If you notice your awareness drifting away from the conversation, refocus your glowing ball of light. If you're reading a report for work, train your eyes on the words as though nothing else exists. Again, if you notice the light of your awareness beginning to shine on something else, bring that ball back to the report. If you make the commitment to practice concentration an hour or so a day, it will soon become second nature.

Whenever possible, try to do one thing at a time. We've talked a bit about multitasking already, but for now just remember that multitasking is a grossly inefficient way to get anything done. If at all feasible, allow yourself to do whatever you're doing to the exclusion of everything else. If you're on the phone, don't scroll through social media at the same time. If you're making breakfast, don't also work on your to-do list for the day. By doing one thing at a time, your concentration "muscle" will become incredibly strong, and your focus will reach limitless levels.

Another key to boosting your concentration is de-cluttering your environment. A Princeton University study found that, "Multiple stimuli present in the visual field at the same time compete for neural representation by mutually suppressing their evoked activity throughout the visual cortex, providing a neural correlate for the limited processing

capacity of the visual system."[4] In layperson's terms, what this means is that physical clutter in your surroundings competes for your attention, which results in decreased performance and increased anxiety and stress levels.

So, if you want to become a master at concentration, divest yourself of the potential for distraction whenever concentration is critical. If you're working on your computer, shut down every application and every open tab other than the ones you absolutely need to perform the task at hand. Limit the number of items in your physical workspace as well. While I think many of us consider a desk piled with books, magazines, papers, pictures of our kids, and souvenirs from our vacations to be cozy or even the sign of an active mind, every single one of those items creates a pull away from your concentration. Family heirlooms are wonderful, and you already know how I feel about books. Just limit the number of these things that share residence with the place where you need to be most productive.

## CALMING YOUR BUSY MIND

Unlimiting your focus requires more than just getting to the tasks at hand. As we've already discussed, focus requires an ability to set aside distractions and give all your attention to what you're doing. But is that even possible anymore? Most of us are working on multiple devices at the same time, often with multiple applications running on each of those devices. We have meetings to attend, e-mails and texts to answer, social media statuses to update, and multiple projects in play. Yet, precisely because of this, it's more important than ever to find ways to bring calm to your mind.

You might not even realize it, but all the input you're getting on any given day is causing you a considerable amount of stress. If you're like many people, you might even think of this as a positive thing, because it means that you're busy, and by being busy, you're making a meaningful contribution to the world. While this might be true, it is *in spite* of this anxiety rather than because of it.

"Anxious thoughts can overwhelm you, making it difficult to make decisions and take action to deal with whatever issue bothers you" writes psychologist Melanie Greenberg, Ph.D., author of *The Stress-Proof Brain.*

“Anxiety can also lead to overthinking, which makes you more anxious, which leads to more overthinking, and so on. How can you get out of this vicious cycle? Repressing anxious thoughts won’t work; they will just pop up again, sometimes with more intensity.”[5]

Juliet Funt is the CEO of the consulting firm WhiteSpace at Work. She describes *whitespace* as “the thinking time, the strategic pause that’s in between the busyness.”[6] When she was on my podcast, Juliet called whitespace “the oxygen that allows everything else to catch fire.”

What both Greenberg and Funt are identifying is the need for all of us to have more time when our minds aren’t cluttered. It’s obvious how doing this will positively affect our mental health. But what’s less obvious is how it will also dramatically improve our focus and our productivity. Some interesting studies in neuroscience underscore this, showing us how distraction is actually changing our brains. One, from University College London, compared the brains of heavy media multitaskers with those of light media multitaskers and found that the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), which is involved in focus, was smaller among the former group. Conversely, a study at the Max Planck Institute found that, among people going through training exercises to increase attention, their ACCs grew thicker.[7]

And distractions can be a serious time sink. A study from University of California, Irvine, shows how distractions can really disrupt your day. “You have to completely shift your thinking, it takes you a while to get into it and it takes you a while to get back and remember where you were,” said Gloria Mark, lead author of the study. “We found about 82 percent of all interrupted work is resumed on the same day. But here’s the bad news—it takes an average of 23 minutes and 15 seconds to get back to the task.”[8] That’s more than 20 minutes every time you’re distracted—and how often are you distracted every day?

Tools like meditation, yoga, and certain martial arts can be tremendously valuable in helping you calm your busy mind. But if you’re in the middle of the day and can’t afford to get away for more than a few minutes, there are still some things you can do. Three important ones are:

### 1. Breathe

We've already talked about the value of taking deep cleansing breaths as part of your morning routine. But doing the same thing is valuable whenever you need to re-center yourself. Holistic health expert Andrew Weil, M.D., developed a breathing tool that he calls the 4–7–8 Method. It works like this:

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of 8.

This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.[9]

### 2. Do Something That Has Been Causing You Stress

This goes back to what we talked about earlier regarding procrastination. As we now all know (thanks to Bluma Zeigarnik), things weighing on our minds are going to continue weighing on our minds until we deal with them. If you're having trouble focusing or if your mind is operating on a dozen planes at the same time, it's very possible the reason this is happening is because there's something that you need to do that you've been avoiding doing. If that's the case, do a little 4–7–8 breathing, deal with the stressful task, and then you can get back to everything else you want to do with increased focus.

***KWIK START***

What is that one important thing that you're avoiding that is affecting your focus?

### 3. Schedule Time for Distractions

It might be a challenge for you to turn off your phone and your e-mail when you need to focus, but if you can convince yourself to do these things, great. They're relatively easy to do. What's likely to be considerably harder is to avoid letting worries and obligations get in the way of whatever you're trying to accomplish in that moment. There's a reason you're seeing these things as worries or obligations, and that makes them much harder to push out of your mind. Addressing one of your concerns head-on, as we just discussed, is one way to deal with this, but there are going to be situations where that's simply not possible. Instead, what if you set aside a specific time in your schedule to move these worries and obligations to the forefront of your mind? Simply saying, "I'll worry about that later" isn't likely to keep that worry from creeping back 20 minutes from now. But saying, "I'll worry about that at 4:15" very well might.

***KWIK START***

Schedule your next distraction time.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

Unlimiting your focus is a key to unleashing your superpowers. When your mind is truly focused, when you're completely throwing yourself at a task, you achieve at levels that are impossible when you're distracted or divided in your thoughts. Before we move on from this chapter, let's try a few things:

- Take a good look at your to-do list and identify the thing (or things) on it that is likely to invade your thoughts until you get it done. Formulate a plan for dealing with that task using some of the antiprocrastination tools you now have.
- Do something right now that changes your productivity environment so you can do a better job of staying on task.
- Practice a technique for calming your busy mind. Does it work for you? If so, commit to using it regularly.



"Nothing has such
a power to broaden
the mind as the
ability to investigate
systematically."



—MARCUS AURELIUS

# 12

# STUDY

**If I'm going to be a lifelong student,
how can I optimize my study time?**

**Is cramming the best way to learn something?**

**How do I become a better note-taker?**

One Friday night, after a very busy workweek, I received a call. The person on the other end of the phone told me that we had a common friend and that this friend had suggested he reach out to me.

"Sure, how can I help you?" I said.

For the first 30 seconds of our call, this man had seemed entirely calm. But with that question, his voice became more animated.

"You've gotta help me, please. My speaker can't make it out tomorrow because of an emergency. He was supposed to give our keynote."

I told him that I was sorry to hear about his predicament but that I didn't take speaking assignments on the spur of the moment. I usually booked speaking gigs six months in advance, and I always gave myself time to prepare for them.

That didn't deter this caller. He said that our mutual friend had raved about speeches he'd seen me give and that if anyone could deliver a strong presentation on short notice it was me.

"Please save me," he said with even more emotion in his voice.

This guy's plight was starting to get to me. I happened to be free on Saturday, and the conference he was throwing was in Manhattan, where I

lived. I decided to ask him the topic of the keynote. When he told me, I stared at the phone as though the caller were speaking to me in an alien language.

“Why are you calling me about this?” I said. “I know nothing about that topic.”

“Yes, but the speaker who canceled has a book.”

“I’m not sure how that matters.”

The caller responded so quickly that it was clear he’d already prepared this argument. “I’ve heard you’re a speed reader. I was thinking you could come in a little early, study the book, and then give the speech.”

This scenario was so completely outlandish that I did the only thing I could do under the circumstances: I took the engagement. How could I turn down a challenge like that? We agreed on the particulars, he told me a bit more about the audience to whom I’d be speaking, and then I hung up, asking myself what just happened.

I got to the conference center the next morning at 10 A.M. The man who’d called the night before handed me a copy of the book and set me up in a quiet room. I was to deliver the keynote at 1 P.M. Over the next three hours, I read the book, made a ton of notes, and laid out the basic parameters of the presentation I was about to give. I then went up on stage and gave a keynote that turned out to be the most highly rated talk of the conference. I was exhausted, but I have to admit that the entire experience was quite the rush.

You are unlikely to ever find yourself in a situation like this. But as outrageous as the caller’s request had been, I knew I could do this, because with competence comes confidence. I’m not saying this to to impress you; I’m saying it to express to you what’s possible. To illustrate to you how any sense of constraint fades when you’ve learned how to absorb a subject in a sitting, remember what you’ve learned, have the ability to highlight the most essential points, and have an understanding of how people learn—in other words, many of the things we’re discussing in this book.

I never would have been able to deliver that particular keynote if I hadn’t been a quick study. And just like the other skills we’ve been addressing here, this isn’t an ability you either do or don’t have. Instead, it’s an ability you’ve either cultivated or haven’t. You can learn how to unlimit your studies. And when you do, it’ll be a superpower you’ll employ the rest of your life.

***KWIK START***

Think about a topic or subject you'd like to learn this month. How would you go about studying this topic? What's your current approach or process?

## THE FOUR LEVELS OF COMPETENCE

Since the sixties, psychologists have noted that there are four levels of competence or learning. The first, known as "unconscious incompetence," is when you don't know what you don't know. For example, you might not even be aware of the fact that something like speed-reading exists. So, you're also not aware that you're currently not capable of doing it.

In the next level, known as "conscious incompetence," you're aware of what you don't know. For example, you're aware that people have learned to read and comprehend much faster through speed-reading techniques, but you yourself have not had any training in this area, nor do you understand what tools are necessary to become a speed-reader.

The third level is "conscious competence." What this means is that you're aware of a skill and have the capacity to perform that skill, but only when you actively put your mind to it. You can do it, but it takes work. Continuing with speed-reading, this would be akin to speed-reading successfully, but only when you focus on employing a speed-reading technique. Similarly at this stage for other activities, like typing or driving, you can do it, but it requires your conscious attention.

The fourth level—the one any lifelong learner is seeking—is "unconscious competence." In this case, you know how to perform a skill, and it's second nature to you. With speed-reading, you would reach the point of unconscious competence when this simply becomes the way you read. You're not *making* yourself read faster; you're just doing so. You are typing or driving without your deliberate attention.

Now the key to get from conscious competence to unconscious competence is obvious. It's practice. Practice makes progress.

While the model psychologists use ends there, I would add a fifth level: true mastery. This is a step beyond unconscious competence to where it's

second nature to perform a skill at an elite level. This is the level of being limitless. And if you're going to be a master, you're going to need to study like a superhero.

## HOW TO STUDY BETTER

Why are most of us restrained in our ability to study? Most people do not know how to study effectively, because they were never taught. Many people naturally assume they already know how to learn. The challenge is that most of the techniques you use now are old and ineffective. Many of them date back hundreds of years.

We now live in a highly competitive information age where information is everywhere. Yet we are still using the same methods to absorb and process it all. Today, our requirements for learning are much different. But most of us were taught that studying was all about reviewing material over and over and over so we could spit it back out during a test. We're going to talk in a moment about why cramming is such a bad idea but suffice it to say, the process is far from optimal.

The most successful people in the world are lifelong students. That means they're continuously learning new skills, keeping up with the latest in their chosen fields, and staying apprised of what other fields might be able to offer to them. As we discussed earlier in this book, there are enormous benefits to spending a lifetime learning, so if you're going to approach your goal of being a limitless learner, you're going to want to make study a part of your entire life.

This is something that James, one of our students, discovered —although it took a little time. James struggled with his education and, after high school, he spent three years working at a liquor store even though he'd always dreamed of becoming a successful businessman. He realized that, in order to fulfill his dream, he was going to have to go to college but, he told me, "It was like pulling teeth. I eventually got my accounting degree, then got into an accounting firm, and then went into banking. But for the longest time, I couldn't build up to being a wealth manager. I got into an analyst position, and that required a lot of learning, a lot of studying, and I was just barely getting by. I had the people skills and I had the discipline, but the studying part was really hard for me. A lot of the designations I have now, I

failed the tests a few times before I got those designations. When it was time to take my CFP exam while I was working, it just became so burdensome."

James was six weeks away from his big test—a test that normally requires 12 weeks of study—when he learned about my speed-reading program. This allowed him to turn the corner, improving his studies, helping him "keep my brain healthy through the whole process of intensively studying," and providing him with a big boost on the day of the test.

James got his CFP designation, and this allowed him to get a new position where he works directly with clients as a wealth manager. He continues to use his newly refined learning skills while going through the vast number of prospectuses he needs to read and understand.

James could easily have allowed restrictions to stop him in his tracks. Instead, he learned to unlimit his old ways of studying to overcome the obstacle in his career.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT CRAMMING?

The all-nighter is an age-old study tradition that many people continue long after their school days are over. Much of this is due to procrastination and putting off the work that needs to be done for that big test or that big presentation. But many people also believe that cramming is their most effective form of preparation. Chances are good, however, that it is not.

"In reality, cramming is associated with emotional, mental and physical impairments that reduce the body's ability to cope with its environment," wrote journalist Ralph Heibutzki in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. He cited a Harvard Medical School study that indicates that cramming leads to many unwanted side-effects, including impaired mental function.[1]

In addition, cramming usually requires forgoing all or at least much of one's normal amount of sleep, and this can wind up undermining the very purpose of cramming. UCLA professor of psychiatry Andrew J. Fuligni coauthored a study on cramming and came away with a clear connection between this by-product of cramming and the expected results. "No one is suggesting that students shouldn't study," he said, "but an adequate amount of sleep is also critical for academic success. These results are consistent

with emerging research suggesting that sleep deprivation impedes learning."[2]

In working with students of all ages, I have learned that cramming is rarely as useful as we would like it to be. Concentrating on one subject for many, many hours makes it less likely that you're going to retain the information. Earlier, we talked about the effect of primacy and recency on memory. If you tend to remember the first thing and the most recent thing best, cramming a huge amount of information between that first and most recent thing is only going to lead to your having more things that you forget. We'll talk about a better alternative in a moment.

Whether you're a high school junior taking five AP classes with the goal of gaining acceptance to a top college or a corporate head faced with the need to stay on top of your rapidly changing industry, you're likely facing two challenges simultaneously: a mountain of information to scale, and little time in which to scale it. If this is you, you're going to want to make sure you're studying as efficiently as you can. Over my years of helping people to learn faster and study better, here are seven of my favorite simple habits to unlimit your studies.

## Habit 1: Employ Active Recall

Active recall is a process through which you review material and then immediately check to determine how much of it you've remembered. This allows you to draw the distinction between simple recognition (familiarity with the words on the page) and recollection (making the material an active part of your memory).

"Most students do not realize how important it is to force themselves to recall," writes neurologist Dr. William Klemm of Texas A&M University. "In part, this is because they are conditioned by multiple-choice tests to recall passively, that is recognize when a correct answer is presented, as opposed to generating the correct answer in the first place. Studies of student learning practices reveal how important to memory formation it is to retrieve information you are trying to memorize."[3]

To employ active recall, do this:

- Review the material you are studying.

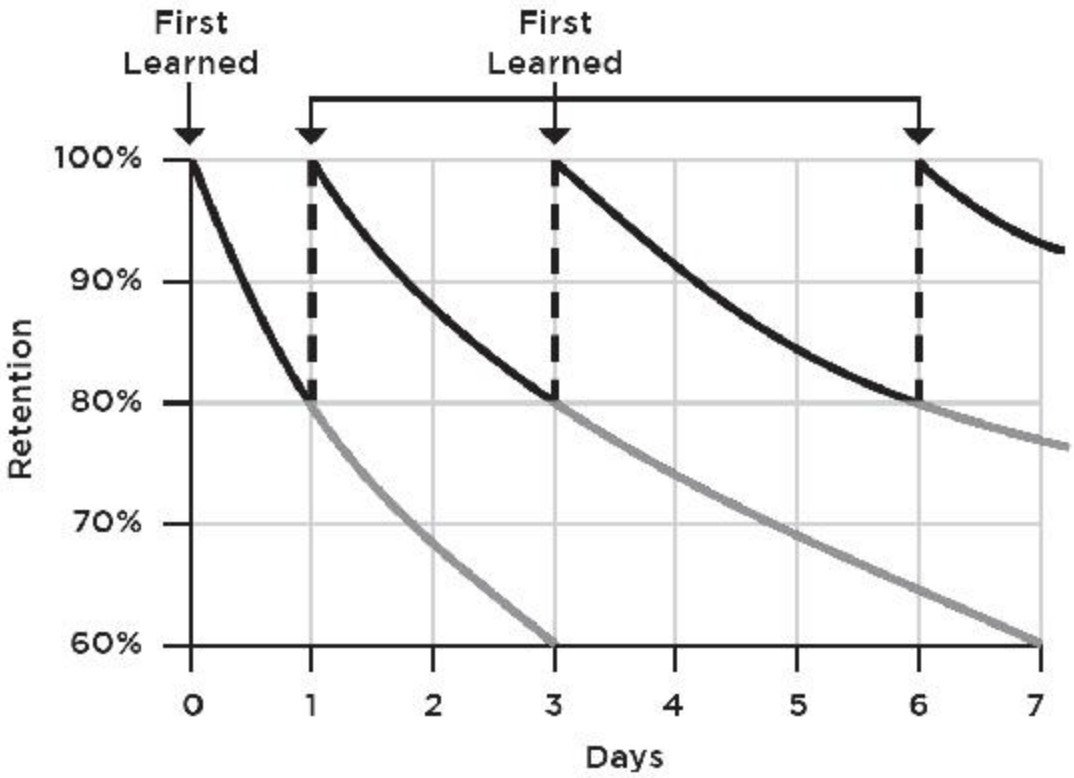
- Then close the book, turn off the video or lecture, and write down or recite everything you remember from what you just reviewed.
- Now, look at the material again. How much did you remember?

Make sure you have enough study time to allow yourself to go through this process multiple times. As Klemm points out, the studies showed that "optimal learning occurred when an initial learning session included repeated study and forced-recall testing of all items at least four times in a row."[4] This leads me to the next important habit to adopt.

## Habit 2: Employ Spaced Repetition

As discussed earlier in this chapter, cramming has many downsides. While it is natural to procrastinate, leaving yourself in situations where you need to study a tremendous amount of material all at once makes it likely that you aren't going to learn that material at all. The reason is that trying to work that way puts us in direct opposition to the way our brains work.

Alternatively, if you space out your reviews of the material, focusing more heavily on information that you haven't retained in the past, you're using your brain to the best of its abilities. "Spaced repetition is simple but highly effective because it deliberately hacks the way your brain works," agrees James Gupta, CEO of the online learning platform Synap. "It forces learning to be effortful and, like muscles, the brain responds to that stimulus by strengthening the connections between nerve cells. By spacing the intervals out, you're further exercising these connections each time. It produces long-term, durable retention of knowledge and, in my experience, once people start using it, they swear by it."[5]




Spaced repetition seems to work most effectively when you can review the material at similar intervals. This is why it's important to give yourself enough time. Perhaps you perform the review once in the morning and again right before dinner for four days in a row, and then move on to other material you need to study at similar intervals. Use this technique in concert with active recall. Review the material, test yourself on what you remember, then take a break before coming back to this particular material.

### Habit 3: Manage the State You're In

As we talked about earlier in this book, the state you're in when you perform any activity will have the greatest impact on your success. For example, if you had a really bad day and were asked to give a presentation for your job or take a test, you most likely would not perform to the best of your ability. This is because your state of mind did not promote optimal performance. On the other hand, if you're feeling great, when the same opportunity arises, you would definitely produce better results. The more positive and resourceful your state, the greater the results you'll produce. Studying is no different.

Your posture also controls the state of your mind. Sit as if you're about to learn the most crucial life-changing information. Did you just have to move? If you did, then notice how you feel more focused after you've changed your posture. When you sit straight, it also facilitates breathing and the circulation of necessary oxygen to your brain and the rest of your body. If you are slumped over, it could stifle the breathing process and make you tired.

***KWIK START***

While you are sitting in a chair, slump over, look down, take short breaths, and put a frown on your face. Do this now. How motivated do you feel to achieve success? How productive do you think you are in this state? This is the posture a lot of students take while studying. Is it any wonder they dislike studying and have to work hard to achieve bare minimum results? Now sit up straight and smile. How much better do you feel?

### Habit 4: Use Your Sense of Smell

I'm sure something like this has happened to you: You walk into a room and discover the air filled with a particular scent. Maybe it's the smell of a specific spice baking in the oven. That scent immediately sends you back to a day with a childhood friend when she made a joke that was so funny that milk came out of your nose. Why would the smell of that spice trigger that memory? Because that smell was in the air when the event that you're remembering happened, and smells are especially effective at bringing memories to the forefront of our brains. The scent of rosemary has been shown to improve memory. Peppermint and lemon promotes concentration.

"The answer is likely due to brain anatomy," writes Jordan Gaines Lewis, postdoctoral researcher at Penn State College of Medicine. "Incoming smells are first processed by the olfactory bulb, which starts inside the nose and runs along the bottom of the brain. The olfactory bulb has direct connections to two brain areas that are strongly implicated in emotion and memory: the amygdala and hippocampus. Interestingly, visual, auditory (sound), and tactile (touch) information do not pass through these brain

areas. This may be why olfaction, more than any other sense, is so successful at triggering emotions and memories."[6]

What this shows us is that smell is an enormously important, yet underused, memory tool. If a particular scent can rocket us back to our childhoods, a different scent can be used to accelerate our recall. If you're studying for a big test, put a bit of a particular essential oil on your wrist while you're studying and then make sure you do the same thing before you take the test. If you do the same thing in preparing for a big meeting, the results should be similar. Obviously, you want to take other people into consideration, so you don't want to douse yourself with the scent, but just a touch is enough to heighten your recall.

## Habit 5: Music for the Mind

Think about how you did some of your earliest learning. Did you, like so many people, memorize the alphabet through a song? Or perhaps you know how a bill gets through Congress because *Schoolhouse Rock* sang it to you. Parents have probably been teaching toddlers basic concepts through music for as long as music has been around. They do it because it works, and it works because there is strong science behind it.

Numerous studies link music to learning. The arousal-and-mood hypothesis, introduced by Dr. E. Glenn Schellenberg, identifies a connection between music and mood and the subsequent connection between mood and learning, suggesting that music can put us in conditions that improve our ability to learn.[7]

Baroque music seems to have some particularly valuable qualities. "Music stabilizes mental, physical and emotional rhythms to attain a state of deep concentration and focus in which large amounts of content information can be processed and learned," states music and learning expert Chris Boyd Brewer. "Baroque music, such as that composed by Bach, Handel or Telemann that is 50 to 80 beats per minute creates an atmosphere of focus that leads students into deep concentration in the alpha brain wave state. Learning vocabulary, memorizing facts, or reading to this music is highly effective."[8]

There's no similar evidence that the results would be the same with, say, rap or K-pop, but because one's reaction to music is such a personal thing, it's possible that this music would work for you as well. But since

streaming music is so ubiquitous, I'd recommend adding a baroque playlist as background to your study sessions. Amazon Music, Apple Music, and Spotify all have baroque playlists and, if you wanted to explore further, each have classical music playlists (comprised largely of baroque music) that have been specifically compiled for the purpose of studying.

### Habit 6: Listen with Your Whole Brain

If you are going to unlimit your learning, you're going to want to make sure your listening skills are fully tuned up. There's a very strong connection between listening and learning, and more than a quarter of us are auditory learners, meaning that the primary way in which we learn is through hearing something.[9]

Listening is critical to learning, and we spend a large percentage of our waking time listening. But most of us are not particularly good at it. "Plenty of studies examine this phenomenon," write Bob Sullivan and Hugh Thompson in their book *The Plateau Effect*. "While listening is the core of most of our communications—the average adult listens nearly twice as much as they talk—most people stink at it. Here's one typical result. Test takers were asked to sit through a 10-minute oral presentation and, later, to describe its content. Half of adults can't do it even moments after the talk, and 48 hours later, fully 75 percent of listeners can't recall the subject matter."[10]

One of the reasons we don't listen well is that we tend not to apply all our brainpower to the exercise. Sullivan and Thompson, who conducted a study with Carnegie Mellon University on the nature of digital distractions, point out that "the human brain has the capacity to digest as much as 400 words per minute of information. But even a speaker from New York City talks at around 125 words per minute. That means three-quarters of your brain could very well be doing something else while someone is speaking to you."[11]

To help alleviate this problem, I've devised a tool that will help you listen with your whole brain. Just remember the acronym HEAR:

- **H is for Halt:** In all likelihood, as you're listening to someone else speak, there will be other things going on in the same space. Maybe there are people milling about. Maybe your phone is chirping, telling

you that you've just received a text. Maybe there's music playing in the room or a television in the background. Meanwhile, you're thinking about your to-do list, your next meeting, or what you're going to have for dinner that night. Do everything you can to tune all of this out and to be completely present with whomever you're listening to. Remember that listening involves more than just the words a person is saying; vocal inflection, body language, facial expressions, and more create additional context and provide additional information. You can absorb all of this only if you halt everything else.

- **E is for Empathy:** If you can imagine yourself in the speaker's shoes, you're likely to learn more from this listening experience than if you do it dispassionately. Trying to understand where the speaker is coming from and why brings additional substance to what they might be saying and allows you to feel it from their perspective.
- **A is for Anticipate:** Engage in the experience with a sense of anticipation. Remember that learning is state-dependent and that what you can learn from this speaker will become a long-term memory if you attach emotion to it. Your enthusiasm for what you're hearing will greatly increase your potential of truly hearing it.
- **R is for Review:** If you have the opportunity to directly engage with the speaker, do so. Ask clarifying questions or maybe even for a point to be repeated. If you're in the position to take notes, do so. And afterward, reflect on what the speaker said. Paraphrase it in your mind and imagine yourself teaching it to someone else. Doing so will solidify it in your mind.

## Habit 7: Take Note of Taking Notes

Studying under the best conditions will likely improve your retention considerably. And, both in preparation for your studies and in concert with your studies, upgrading your note-taking ability is invaluable.

The ultimate advantage of taking notes is that they customize the information you need to retain to your vocabulary and your mode of thinking. At their best, notes allow you to organize and process information in a way that makes it most likely that you can use this information afterward.

But many people take notes ineffectively. Common pitfalls include concentrating so heavily on writing notes that you're not actually listening to the information, trying to write down every single thing you hear, and writing notes in such a way that they won't be helpful to you a day later. It's easy to avoid all of these pitfalls once you are aware of them, so let's put a plan together for upgrading your note-taking ability.

First off, be sure that you understand the purpose for taking these notes. For example, the goal of taking notes in a midsemester lecture might be very different from the notes you take in the review class before a big final. Similarly, what you're trying to accomplish with the notes you take in a weekly meeting with your team is likely to be different from the notes you take in the week leading up to a major client presentation.

By being clear on your intention with your notes, you are able to distinguish between information that is relevant to you and information that is not. I have a friend who is a writer and insists on transcribing every interview he does even though it would be more time-efficient to have a transcription service do it for him. The reason, he says, is that by doing it himself he only transcribes the parts of the interview that he knows he's going to be able to use, therefore eliminating the possibility that these quotes will get lost among all the other conversation that might not be relevant to the book he's writing. What he's left with is nearly pure content. Likewise, if you take notes with a goal in mind, every note you take will have relevance.

Once you're clear on your goals, take an active approach to note-taking. Listen with the intention of getting exactly what you need, and write your notes in ways that will benefit your recall later. If you're going to use abbreviations and shortcuts, use ones that are familiar to you. The last thing you want is for your own notes to be indecipherable to you later.

Equally important is making sure that you use your own words wherever possible. As noted earlier, one of the key pitfalls to effective note-taking is trying to record *everything*. There are two obvious downsides to this. One is that it is impossible to write as quickly as most people speak. On average, people handwrite 10 to 12 words a minute, and the average speaker speaks at around 100 words a minute. Even if you were typing your notes (which I don't recommend; more on this shortly), you'd probably only be able to get down about half of what the speaker was saying.

But there's an even more fundamental downside: If you're copying what someone is saying verbatim, you're probably not processing any of it. That means that, at the most essential moment of learning, you're utilizing most of your brain to the task of taking dictation. When you use your own words in your notes, you begin to process the information, and that greatly enhances learning.

And while we're on the subject of writing, I'd recommend handwriting your notes. Even if you're using a tablet computer to store your notes, use an electronic pen to do so. For one thing, there are readily available programs that can convert your handwriting to text for later organization. But most importantly, writing by hand requires you to start processing the material immediately, and that has proven to be more effective.

"The present research suggests that even when laptops are used solely to take notes, they may still be impairing learning because their use results in shallower processing," write Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer in their study on this topic. "We found that students who took notes on laptops performed worse on conceptual questions than students who took notes longhand. We show that whereas taking more notes can be beneficial, laptop note takers' tendency to transcribe lectures verbatim rather than processing information and reframing it in their own words is detrimental to learning."[12]

Most importantly, make sure you are really listening. You're not there as a secretary; you're there as someone who is receiving information for later use. Therefore, it is important to actually hear what others are saying. Take note of what's being emphasized. Make sure you're understanding the points the speaker is making and, if the opportunity is available, ask questions. This can only happen if you're devoting at least as much attention to the information being delivered as you are to your recording of that information.

While you're taking notes, use a method that I call "capture and create." On the left side of the paper, you're capturing, you're taking notes; on the right side, you're creating, you're making notes. You're writing your impression of what you're capturing. How can I use this? Why must I use this? When will I use this?

After your note-taking session is over, review your notes immediately. This will help you retain the information much more effectively than if you don't read your notes for days. As an added benefit, you'll be able to

supplement your notes with anything you might have missed while taking them, because the information will still be fresh in your mind.

## A TIP FOR UPGRADING YOUR NOTE-TAKING

If you want to make sure you're always getting the most from your note-taking, remember the mnemonic TIP:

- **T is for Think:** Before you begin any session where you're going to be taking notes, think about what you're hoping to retain most from this session. This will help you filter the high-value information from the information that is less relevant to your goal.
- **I is for Identify:** Listen carefully to the information being presented and identify what is most important in the context of your goal. Remember that attempting to write down everything is going to make it impossible to process the information at the time and will probably make studying harder. Identify what you need the most and write that down.
- **P is for Prioritize:** As you review your notes after the presentation, prioritize the information that is most valuable to you, perhaps adding additional notes as necessary to make the priority information clearer or making an outline to highlight key points.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

If you acknowledge that unlimiting yourself means being a student for life, then how you go about your studies is vitally important. Before we move on to the next chapter, let's try a few things:

- Take your active recall out for a spin. Introduce yourself to some new material and immediately assess how much of it you retained.
- Find a music playlist that works for you. There are many of them available, and the right music is likely to enhance your ability to absorb information, so take some time to find one that you like. Maybe

you'll even want to have it in the background while you read the rest of this book.

- Try out your new note-taking tools. Maybe go through this chapter again and take notes about it. Or watch a TED talk and take notes on that instead. Use the skills you've learned here to upgrade this experience.



# 13

# MEMORY

**What can I do to improve my memory right away?**

**How do I keep a big chunk of information in my memory?**

**How can I easily access this information when I need it?**

A few years back, I walked into our office early in the morning, before anyone else had come in. The phone started ringing, so I went to answer it. Immediately, a woman's effusive voice sang out from the other end.

"I love you, I love you, I love you!"

Trust me that this was not a common response I received to answering a call.

"Whoa," I said. "Who is this?"

"It's Anne. I took your course." She then quickly declared, "I found it!"

Okay, she had me. "What did you find?"

"I don't know what it is, but I've been doing all of these exercises you've been teaching, and I've started to remember things. Even when I'm not using the strategy, I'm remembering names and conversations."

So, she hadn't answered that question, either. I realized I was just going to have to let her tell her story the way she wanted to tell it. Over the next few minutes, I learned that a few years earlier she'd been given a family heirloom from her grandmother. It was a necklace that had been passed down from generation to generation, and her grandmother skipped over her own daughter and her three older sisters to bequeath the necklace to her. Anne was extremely honored to receive this gift and vowed to be careful with it. There was only one problem: She'd been so concerned about keeping the necklace safe that she'd hidden it somewhere that she couldn't remember. When she realized she didn't know where the necklace was, she started searching, but to no avail. This led to monumental levels of angst and an enormous amount of guilt compounded by her family.

After three years, she'd come to the conclusion that she'd either misplaced the heirloom forever or that someone had stolen it. Then, at 2 A.M. the morning of this call,

she woke up out of a dead sleep. She went down two flights of stairs to her basement, ran over to the boiler, moved behind it, and reached into a crevasse there. She pulled out the necklace and nearly died from the relief.

“That’s an amazing story, congratulations,” I said to her. “I’m curious, though. I didn’t teach you how to find misplaced items. That’s not one of the things we’ve covered in our classes.”

“Yes, but you did something way more valuable. I don’t know what it is, but for the past few weeks I’m just remembering all kinds of things. Not just in the present, but stuff I hadn’t thought about for years.

“Jim, thank you for giving me my brain back.”

What Anne was illustrating through her excitement is something I’ve been sharing with people for a long time. Yes, your brain is an organ. But it acts like a muscle. And it most significantly resembles a muscle in that it’s a use-it-or-lose-it device. Our brains stay fit only when we make a concerted effort to keep them fit. If we fail to keep our brains in shape—either through laziness or being overly dependent on technology to do our thinking for us or by failing to challenge ourselves with new learning—it becomes “flabby.” Think about it this way: If you have your arm in a sling for six months, you don’t come away with a stronger arm. In fact, after you take the arm out of a sling, you’re likely to have very little function at all. Your brain is the same way. If you don’t exercise it regularly, it might not be at its best when you need it the most. But if you make the effort to keep your brain in top shape, you’ll discover that it’s always ready to do superhero-level work for you, just as it did for this caller.

## YOU CAN ALWAYS RELY ON MOM

Memory is arguably the most important part of the learning process. If you could not remember, then you could not learn anything. There is no knowledge without memory. But why do most people have less-than-ideal memory skills? I think it’s because of the way we were taught to memorize things, which was usually through rote memorization. To this day, most schools teach students to memorize by repeating a fact or a quote until it is temporarily burned in, even though people tend to forget this information as soon as they no longer need it and this type of memory rarely leads to mastery of the material being memorized.

Your memory is also one of your greatest assets. It supports you in every area of your life. I challenge you to do anything without utilizing your memory. If you did not have a memory, life would be extremely challenging, to say the least. Imagine waking up each day and forgetting everything you ever knew. You would have to teach yourself how to get out of bed, how to get dressed, how to brush your teeth, how to eat your breakfast, and how to drive a car. That would be quite inconvenient. Luckily you were born with a great memory; you just need to be shown how to use it.

***KWIK START***

How would you rate your memory right now? What aspects would you like to improve? Take our memory assessment at www.LimitlessBook.com/resources to understand more.

If you're going to perform a major upgrade on your brain, you're going to want to unlimit your memory, as memory is such a fundamental part of most brain function. Since that's the case, let me reassure you with a very important fact: There's no such thing as a good memory or a bad memory; there is only a trained memory and an untrained memory. If you have trouble remembering people's names, making presentations without notes, or even finding your car keys in the morning, it's extremely unlikely that this is because you're incapable of doing these things. Instead, you just haven't gotten the training.

Joshua Foer is proof positive that memory can be trained. In 2005, Joshua was a journalist who had taken on the assignment of writing about the little-known world of mental athletes. Fascinated by what he saw in elite memorization contests, he wanted to discover more about the participants. To his surprise, he learned that almost every participant he interviewed described themselves as having a poor or average memory before they learned and practiced the principles of memorization. Now they were competing at the highest levels of these contests.

It dawned on Foer that there were no restrictions to memory and that memory can be trained just like athletic skill. He began to practice what he learned. One year later, he returned to the U.S.A. Memory Championship but this time as a competitor. The day of the event, we had lunch together between competitions and marveled at the fact that often what appears to be genius can actually be learned. Later that day, Foer placed number one and took home the trophy. He went on to write the groundbreaking book *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*.

Why is memory so important if you're going to unlimit yourself? Because your memory serves as the foundation for every action you take now and every one you will take in the future. Imagine what it would be like if your computer had very little storage or had inconsistent access to what it had stored. Most functions would be nearly impossible to perform—you'd start to write an e-mail message, and your computer might or might not have the addressee among your contacts and might or might not remember how to send the message after you'd written it—and the ones that it did perform would take excruciatingly long while your computer figured out how to do it.

While I've likened our brains to supercomputers, we all know that they're so much more than that. Perhaps the most significant difference is our ability to reason, to consider the facts or the situation in front of us, and to act, innovate, or navigate through circumstances based on those facts and situations. The process of reasoning

requires us to shift through our rich store of memories, using tools that have proven useful in the past to make informed and productive decisions.

"It is impossible to think creatively into the future without a sense of what is known," writes Dr. Eve Marder, professor of neuroscience at Brandeis University. "We commonly say that we are looking for interdisciplinary and synthetic thinkers who can make connections between disparate fields and see new paths for discovery. I cannot imagine finding those creative leaders for the future among the legions of students who forget everything they have learned because they can 'just look it up.' How does one know what to look up if one has forgotten so much?"[1]

Dr. William R. Klemm, who we met in Chapter 12, gives us five reasons why improving memory is essential:

1. **Memorization is discipline for the mind.** Much needed in an age when so many minds are lazy, distracted, have little to think about, or think sloppily. Memorization helps train the mind to focus and be industrious.
2. **No, you can't always "Google it."** Sometimes you don't have access to the Internet. And not everything of importance is on the web (and a great deal of irrelevant trash will accompany any search). Nor is looking up material helpful under such situations as when you learn to use a foreign language, must write or speak extemporaneously, or wish to be an expert.
3. **Memorization creates the repertoire of what we think about.** Nobody can think in a vacuum of information. To be an expert in any field requires knowledge that you already have.
4. **We think with the ideas held in working memory, which can only be accessed at high speed from the brain's stored memory.**Understanding is nourished by the information you hold in working memory as you think. Without such knowledge, we have a mind full of mush.
5. **The exercise of the memory develops learning and memory schema that promote improved ability to learn.** The more you remember, the more you *can* learn.[2]

I want to emphasize this last point. It's not accurate that your memory works like a container, cup, or hard drive in that once it's full of data no more can fit. It's more like a muscle in that the more you train it, the stronger it gets and the more you can store.

In this chapter, we're going to discuss some tools and techniques designed to train your memory. You will be applying basic principles of the mind and developing your memory in such a way that will make learning (remembering) more natural, easy, and fun. The most fundamental of these, though, is this: always remember MOM, a mnemonic device I created to kick up your memory instantly:

- **M is for Motivation:** The simple fact is that we are considerably more likely to remember things that we are motivated to remember. If someone says to you, “Hey, remember our call tomorrow,” you may or may not remember that you’ve scheduled a call with that person. If instead he says, “Hey, if you remember our call tomorrow, I’ll give you $5,000,” you will definitely remember that you’ve scheduled the call. You are overwhelmingly more likely to remember something when you have a strong motivation to do so. So, if you want to train yourself to have a stronger memory, give yourself a stronger motivation to do so. Reasons reap results, so make remembering personal. If you can convince yourself that there’s value in retaining a memory, there’s a good chance that you will.
- **O is for Observation:** How often do you forget someone’s name as soon as you hear it? The reason is likely that you weren’t entirely paying attention when you heard that name. Maybe you were looking around the room to see who else you knew. Maybe you were still thinking about a conversation you’d just had. For whatever reason, you weren’t entirely present. Most of the time, when we fail to remember something, the issue isn’t *retention* but rather *attention*. If you’re serious about boosting your memory, condition yourself to be truly present in any situation where you want to remember something.
- **M is for Methods:** Over the course of this chapter, I’m going to provide you with a set of tools that you’ll be able to use when you want to remember something. Make sure you’re always carrying these around in your mental toolkit, and be sure to employ them to the point where they become second nature.

## THE MORE MEMORABLE BAKER

The chances of remembering something increase dramatically if people can attach a reference point to the thing they are trying to remember. A number of years ago, after a study testing peoples’ ability to put names to faces, researcher Gillian Cohen coined the name for what came to be known as the Baker/baker Paradox. In the study, participants were shown photographs of faces, offered the names and various details about the people in the photographs, and then asked to later recall the names. The study showed that people had far more trouble remembering last names than they did occupations, even when the last name and the occupation was the same word. So, for example, it turned out to be significantly easier for a participant to remember that someone was a baker than that their last name was Baker.

Let’s go back to Joshua Foer a moment for an explanation:

> When you hear that the man in the photo is a baker, that fact gets embedded in a whole network of ideas about what it means to be a baker: He cooks bread, he wears a big white hat, he smells good when he comes home from work.

> The name Baker, on the other hand, is tethered only to a memory of the person's face. That link is tenuous, and should it dissolve, the name will float off irretrievably into the netherworld of lost memories. But when it comes to the man's profession, there are multiple strings to reel the memory back in.
>
> Even if you don't at first remember that the man is a baker, perhaps you get some vague sense of breadiness about him or see some association between his face and a big white hat, or maybe you conjure up a memory of your own neighborhood bakery. There are any number of knots in that tangle of associations that can be traced back to his profession.[3]

What the Baker/baker Paradox illustrates for us is that creating associations for ourselves is likely to boost our memories dramatically. The exercises on the following pages are tools along these lines that I have found particularly effective.

## RECALLING A GREAT DEAL OF INFORMATION

One of the things I do regularly when I'm speaking to large groups is ask audience members to throw out a group of random words—somewhere between thirty and a hundred—that I will then repeat, backward and forward. It never fails to get an awed reaction from the crowd, but that isn't what I'm looking for. Instead, I do this to get across a key point: that everyone has the capacity to do the same thing.

We've already talked about the importance of memory in performing nearly all brain functions. If you're going to unlimit your brain and therefore unlimit yourself, you need to unlimit your memory. This means training your memory to the point where it can retain a great deal of information and allow you easy access to that information. What I do on stage with the list of a hundred words might have the immediate impact of a parlor trick, but how I trained myself to do this is through a technique that anyone can use to remember and access lots of information. Maybe in your case it's the specifications for your entire line of products. Or maybe it's a long string of mathematical formulas. Maybe it's the directions to all the stops on your swim-practice carpool. Whatever it is, this tool can help.

For the sake of this exercise, let's talk about how to memorize a list of words. The technique will be the same regardless, but it'll be easier to explain it to you if we can focus on a particular thing.

Below we have provided you with a list of simple words. Your assignment is to memorize them in the order they are given. Spend no more than 30 seconds looking at the list, then flip the page over. Good luck!

| | |
|---|---|
| Fire Hydrant | Diamond |
| Balloon | Knight |

| | |
|---|---|
| Battery | Ox |
| Barrel | Toothpaste |
| Board | Sign |

What was the method you used to remember this list? Did you repeat the words in your head over and over? For instance, were you saying to yourself “fire hydrant, balloon, battery, fire hydrant, balloon, battery, fire hydrant, balloon, battery, barrel, etc.” Did you find that you needed to repeatedly say the words over and over again, until they stayed in your head? Did you try to see the words as pictures in your mind? Most people use one or a combination of the first two methods described. The process of repeatedly saying or writing information down to remember it is called repetition learning, otherwise known as rote learning.

You may have used rote learning in the second grade to remember your multiplication tables. You would say to yourself “seven times seven is forty-nine, seven times seven is forty-nine, seven times seven . . . .” Or you may have written it out “7 × 7 = 49, 7 × 7 = 49, 7 × 7 = 49,” and would continue to fill up your sheet of paper. This is also most likely the method you used in elementary school to learn how to spell. Your teacher may have asked you to spell a word like *chair* 50 times on a piece of paper. What was happening was your natural learning ability was being stifled. You bored your mind continually with this method until it finally gave up and said *You win! For the 100th time, Columbus landed in 1492, just no more of this chanting!*

Most people find rote learning to be a very tedious and boring process. It taxes your mind and is extremely ineffective for remembering most things. We know that as much as 85 percent of the information you take the time to remember in this fashion is lost in only 48 hours. That is why some students find the need to cram, because they know that the material will be lost in a very short period of time.

## ELEMENTARY LEARNING

One of the reasons rote learning is inefficient is because it only involves a small part of your brain. You’re using a more analytical part of your brain to process information and store what you need to learn. By implementing rote learning, you only engage part of your mind and an even smaller portion of your potential.

In the traditional education system, you probably learned this way in such topics as:

- **History:** “Calvin Coolidge was the 30th president of the United States, Coolidge 30, 30 Coolidge . . .”
- **Chemistry:** “Glucose C6H12O6, Glucose C6H12O6, Glucose C6H12O6 . . .”

- **French:** "*Comment allez-vous* means 'how are you?' *Comment allez-vous* means 'how are you?' C*omment allez-vous* is 'how are you?' . . ."

The list goes on and on and on and on. The question you must ask yourself now: "Is the way I learned in elementary school the best method for me to learn today?" The answer is most likely no. In school, they taught you the three Rs: reading, 'riting, and 'rithmatic (too bad spelling wasn't one of them). I always thought the fourth R should have been recall. Your requirements for learning have changed a lot over the years. Repetition learning had some decent results when you were younger, but in today's world, it will leave you drowning in information and mental fatigue. (Note: The word *rote* literally means "an unthinking repetition or mechanical memorization.")

In this section I'm going to show you the skills to remember more effectively than you ever thought possible. These skills will help you to replace the feeling of hoping you'll remember with the feeling of confidence in knowing that the information you possess will be available, whenever you need it.

Now, take a minute and, without looking back, try to recall the list in the order it was presented. Write down as much as you can remember. Take a minute and do this now.

_____

_____

_____

How did you do? If you are like most people, you probably were able to retain a few of the words on the list.

### *KWIK START*

Now let's try something else. Take a minute and stretch. Take a few deep breaths. Clear your mind and relax more with every breath that leaves your body. Just take a moment and relax. When you are done, continue.

Next, make sure you are comfortable and imagine you're standing next to a giant fire hydrant, the biggest one you've ever seen. Now, attach a bunch of balloons on top of the fire hydrant. There are so many balloons that it takes the hydrant out of the ground so it floats up high in the sky. Then suddenly it is hit with a load of batteries and explodes. The batteries are being launched into the sky in large barrels. The barrels are being thrown up with a wooden board like a seesaw. The board is being balanced by a large diamond, a big brilliant sparkling stone. Then a knight in shining armor takes the

diamond and runs away. He's quickly stopped by an ox. The only way to get through is to brush the teeth of the ox with toothpaste. The ox moves aside and reveals a big neon sign with the word *Congratulations* on it, and then there is a huge explosion.

Now take a minute, close your eyes and review this little story. You may read the story again if you need to. Do this now before continuing.

***KWIK START***

Without looking back, write the story down.

As you may be aware, we turned your list into a story. Now go through the story in your mind and list as many of the words as you can remember. Check your answers and write down the number you got correct.

How did you perform the second time? If you are like most students, you were able to recall more of the words than you did previously. The amazing thing is that once you start training your memory in this way, you can use this tool to memorize vast amounts of information. I've used this technique to help actors learn all their lines in a script, to help students memorize the periodic table, and to help salespeople speak about a product with a level of granularity that made it seem as though they'd engineered the item themselves. Remember that there's no such thing as a good memory or a bad memory, only a trained memory or an untrained memory. Employing this tool regularly will give you the kind of training that you can access in all kinds of situations.

## YOUR ACTIVE FOCUS IN MEMORY

This is a very important concept: Most people approach learning as a passive activity. They encounter information in books, notes, or lectures and if the material is absorbed, great! But if it is not, they feel that there is nothing they can do. This passive outlook is the hit-or-miss approach. It holds that if the information sticks, it's more a result of luck and repetition than focus and skill. By taking a more active approach to learning, you will have greater results and the satisfaction that comes from involvement and personal awareness. Learning passively is weak; active learning is strong.

"The secret of a good memory is attention, and attention to a subject depends upon our interest to it. We rarely forget that which has made a deep impression on our minds."



—TYRON EDWARDS

## Visualization

Your visual memory is very powerful. By seeing the pictures a story paints and not just the words that represent those pictures, you create a stronger means by which to remember. Thinking is done through the use of pictures. Do this now: Think of your bed. What did you visualize? Maybe you saw a queen-size mattress, with a wooden headboard, navy-blue sheets, and giant pillows. You probably did not see the words *navy-blue sheets* and *giant pillows* in your mind; you saw pictures of them. This is how your mind thinks. If you doubt this, then ask yourself, do you frequently find yourself dreaming in words? Probably not. Remember a picture is worth a thousand words!

## Association

This is the key to memory and all of learning: In order to learn any new piece of information, it must be associated with something you already know.

This is worth repeating. To remember any new piece of information, you must associate it with something you already know. You have done this all your life; you just might not have been aware of it. Here's a simple test. What comes to your mind when you think of a cherry? Perhaps red, sweet, fruit, pie, round, seeds, etc. These are words and pictures that you have learned to link to a cherry. You associated something you knew to something you did not know. You use association to ride a bike, eat your food, have a conversation, and to learn to do anything. In the same way, by making a story out of the words on your list, you associated them consciously, for easier recall. Your mind is constantly making countless associations every minute, most of them without your conscious awareness. This is how you learn. Do you have a song that reminds you of a special person? That memory is an association. Do you have a smell that reminds you of a time in your childhood? That memory is an association. Why not use this information and make associations consciously to learn more effectively?

"All thought is a
feat of association:
having what's
in front of you
bring up something
in your mind that you
almost didn't know
you knew."



—ROBERT FROST

### Emotion

Adding emotion makes something memorable. Information by itself is forgettable, but information combined with emotion becomes a long-term memory. When we add emotions to something, we make it adventurous, we make it action-filled, we make it humorous, and we're much more likely to remember it.

### Location

We are really good at recalling places because as hunter-gatherers, we didn't need to remember numbers and words, but we needed to remember where things were. We needed to know where the clean water was, where the fertile soil was, where the food was. If you can associate something with a place, you're more likely to remember it.

These are some of the keys to having a great memory; the rest of this chapter will be dedicated to showing you specific techniques and applications you can use in different situations. If you did not have much luck with the memory story, don't worry. This is understandable, you may just need a little practice. Most people have not used their imaginations since they were children. You may want to review the story a few times as it will be a good workout for your creative mind. Do this now.

Notice that you can also go through the story backward; the associations can give you the list in any order. Practice this and see for yourself.

You should be truly amazed. For most people, using rote methods, it takes anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes to memorize this list and with only very temporary results. However, you'll find that this story, which took you no more than a minute to learn, will be available for you to recall days or even weeks from now without reviewing it once. This is the power of working smart and not hard. This is the power of your imagination. This is the power of your mind. Let's try it again.

## A KWIK MEMORY EXERCISE

Ask a friend to give you a list of 10 random words. Or you can make a list yourself: To make this as random as possible, grab the nearest piece of

printed media available to you, whether it's a book, a newspaper, a magazine, or a flyer from your local supermarket. Use the first substantive words in the first 10 paragraphs you see (in other words, don't use things like *I*, *the*, *when*, etc.), making sure not to use any word more than once. Write these down.

Now flip over the paper you wrote these words on and try to write the list again, in order. Check what you wrote against the original list. How did you do? You probably didn't remember all 10, but you probably didn't forget all 10, either. That's instructive, because genius leaves clues, by which I mean that your innate intelligence teaches you about your intelligence. There was a method that allowed you to memorize what you did, and you can access that to move to the next step.

Tell yourself out loud which of the words you remembered and why you think you remembered those words. Doing so will help you to understand how you memorize things. For example, there's a good chance that you remembered the first word and the last word. This is that common phenomenon we discussed back in Chapter 4 known as primacy and recency, where people tend to remember the first thing as well as the most recent thing they heard in any given situation. Which other words did you remember? Do these words have anything in common, such as that they all start with the same letter or they're all action words? What does this tell you? Were the other words you memorized organized in any way? Did they evoke any kind of emotion in you? Was there something unique about any of the words you remembered?

What you've likely learned by this point is that the words you were able to remember on your first pass had certain qualities about them. The words you didn't remember failed to have any quality that resonated with you. So, let's create a process where every word has a memorable quality.

- Tell yourself a story using these 10 words, moving from one word to the next. You're not trying to win a literary competition with this story, and it doesn't matter if the story makes much sense. What's important is that you provide some kind of imaginative detail for all the words on your list (for example, if one of your words is *outside*, imagine that you're in a vast field) and that you "link" your words in the story in the order in which they appear on your list by creating an image for each.

Remember, the more emotional and exaggerated they are, the better you will recall.

- Now, on a separate piece of paper, write down the list again, using the story you created to remind you of the words and of the order in which they appeared. How did you do this time? In all likelihood, you did better, though there's a good chance you still didn't get all of them.
- Now write down the list again (not looking at any previous versions of the list you created), but this time write it down backward. You'll need to access the story you invented in a different way in order to do this, but this is really going to help lock these words down for you.

At this point, you've probably memorized most if not all the words on your list. At the same time, you're likely wondering how this is going to help you remember all the details in a presentation you're giving.

## DELIVERING A GREAT DEAL OF INFORMATION WITHOUT NOTES

As we've discussed, your memory is fundamental to nearly everything you do. There's really no way to unlimit yourself without having a well-trained memory, because memory governs your ability to reason, to calculate possible outcomes, and to serve as a resource to others. And sometimes you just need to be able to deliver a significant amount of information to a person or a group of people at once. This might take the form of delivering a report to your board, giving a speech to an assemblage, sharing your expertise in a subject in front of your class, or any number of other situations. And in many of these cases, it's critical that you be able to do this without having any notes in front of you, because the notes would suggest that you are less well versed in the material than you should be.

I've been teaching business executives, students, actors, and others a time-honored technique for making their presentations without notes. And when I say time-honored, I mean this quite literally. The method I teach and that I'm going to share with you now is a version of the loci method, something that has been around for more than 2,500 years.

The legend behind the loci method is that the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos survived a building collapse that killed all others in attendance. When officials tried to identify the victims, Simonides was the only person who could help them, because he remembered who the victims were based on where they were standing at the time of the collapse. In the process, Simonides created a memory tool that is as effective today as it was in 500 B.C.

*Loci* is the plural version of the word *locus*, which means "a particular point or place." The loci method, then, is a memory tool that aligns the things you want to remember with specific points or places that you know well. Here's how I teach it:

- Identify the 10 major talking points from your presentation. These can be keywords or phrases or perhaps quotations that you want to incorporate. They should not, however, be multiple paragraphs long, as that will make this process cumbersome and your presentation feel stiff and overly rehearsed. The assumption here is that you know your topic well and that you have some facility with the material. This method is designed to help bring each of the key points to the forefront of your mind when you need them.
- Now imagine a place that you know well. This can be a part of your home, a street that you walk often, a nearby park, or anything else with which you have a great deal of familiarity and that you can easily recall vividly.
- Now consider a path through that location. If it's a room in your house, for example, imagine walking into that room and traveling through it. Identify 10 spots in this room that you can quickly see in your mind. Maybe one is the lamp in the corner that you see as you enter the room. Perhaps another is the chair just to the left of that lamp. The next might be the side table next to that chair, and so on. Make this path as procedural as possible. Zig-zagging around the space is likely to be less productive. Just see yourself walking through this space clockwise noticing what you always notice as you pass each item.
- Once you've picked out your 10 locations, assign a major talking point to each of these locations. Be sure to make the order of your talking points match the order in which you walk through the room. For

example, using the room we just described, if the first thing you want to say is the keynote message to your entire presentation, assign that to the lamp. If the next major talking point is an essential product detail or a key historical fact, assign that to the chair, and so on.

- Now practice your presentation, using your walk through the location as a tool for remembering each of the primary messages in the presentation. Each component of the presentation should come to you as you need it.

As with all tools, this memory tool might require some time for you to become expert at it, but it will likely begin to help you immediately. With practice you should find it possible for you to access large chunks of information without referring to your notes. Your recall will improve dramatically, and your speeches and reports will seem more natural. You can employ this approach whenever you need to memorize in bulk.

## BONUS TOOL 1: A QUICK WAY TO REMEMBER EVERYONE'S NAME

As we discussed earlier, failure to remember something like the name of a person you've just met is often a case of your not being attentive in that moment. Remembering MOM can be enormously helpful in that regard. But I also have a technique specifically geared to helping people remember names that you might find useful. The mnemonic here is BE SUAVE:

- **B is for Believe:** Believing that you're going to be able to do this is the essential first step. If you try hard enough to convince yourself that you can't remember names, you'll succeed.
- **E is for Exercise:** As with the other tools in this book, doing this is going to take some practice, but you should be able to become very good at this very quickly.
- **S is for Say it:** When you hear a person's name for the first time, say it back. This will both confirm that you heard the name correctly and offer you the opportunity to hear the name twice.

- **U is for Use it:** During the course of your conversation with this person, use their name. This will help lock it in.
- **A is for Ask:** Ask where a person's name came from. This would be a bit odd if you were asking about a name like "Jim," but it's particularly helpful when meeting someone with a less-common name.
- **V is for Visualization:** Vision is an incredibly powerful memory tool, as we already saw with the loci method. Try to attach an image to a person's name. For example, if you meet someone named Mary, you can imagine that person wearing a wedding veil on the day she gets married.
- **E is for End:** When you part ways with that person, end your conversation by saying the person's name.

## BONUS TOOL 2: A QUICK WAY TO REMEMBER VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGES

Vocabulary is one of the cornerstones of learning. To remember the meaning of words is easy; just use the very same systems you have been using. One of the most powerful concepts is word substitution. You already know how to do this, you just now have a name or a vocabulary term for it. Word substitution is the process of turning intangible (hard to picture) information into an image that is more concrete and easy to visualize.

Here are some examples of word substitutions:

- Nitrogen can be a knight
- Monroe can be a man rowing
- Washington can be by a washing machine
- Armstrong can be by a strong arm

The main idea behind word substitution is coming up with a picture (or series of linked pictures) that sounds similar enough to remind you of the original word. This abstract word, idea, or concept that was once so difficult

to understand is now not so foreign. By creating a picture of the word, you now have something more tangible, something you can see. Remember that we tend to remember that which we create. Some more examples:

- Cytology, *the study of cells.* You see a towel with a huge "G" (cytology) on it. You have always wanted one, so you take it, and you are thrown in a jail cell. Or you sigh, looking at your toe, in a low G (sigh toe low G), but this is not allowed and you are put in a cell and forced to study. Even though this is thoroughly bizarre, it is very memorable, and it works!
- Lenient, *compassionate, gentle.* Picture a leaning ant (an ant leaning). The ant is leaning on a clean wall and getting it dirty. His mother, instead of being angry, is compassionate and gentle.

This system can be used for practically anything, including learning foreign languages, which works the same way as remembering vocabulary. In fact, some of the vocabulary words you encounter in English might as well be in another language! For example:

- *Très bien* (French), which sounds like tray bean, means "very good." Picture yourself babysitting and rewarding the child a silver tray with a giant bean on it. The child was very good.
- *Facile* (French), which sounds like face eel, means "easy." Picture a friend challenging you to hold an eel close to your face; you do it and say, "That's easy!"
- *Travailler* (French), which sounds like traveler, means "to work." Picture a traveler coming up to you and inviting you on a vacation, but you can't go because you have to work.
- *Escargot* (French), which sounds like scar go, means "snail." Picture a snail getting into an S-car (car shaped like an *S*) and making the car go.
- *Merci* (French), which sounds like mare sea, means "thank you." Picture yourself saving a mare from drowning in the sea. She then says "thank you."
- *Aprender* (Spanish), which sounds like a blender, means "to learn." Picture yourself taking your books and putting them in a blender.

- *Escuela* (Spanish), which sounds like S-quail, means “school.” Picture a quail with a giant superman *S* on its chest going to your school.
- *Ayuda* (Spanish), which sounds like are-you-the, means “help.” Picture yourself drowning (in need of help) and someone comes to rescue you and asks, “Are you the person drowning?”
- *Mando* (Spanish), which sounds like man (or moon) doe, means “to command.” Picture a man commanding a doe to jump to the moon.
- *Estrada* (Spanish), which sounds like extra day, means “road or highway.” Picture yourself going on vacation and being stuck in traffic for an extra day on the highway.

Try these Spanish terms on your own:

- *Desventaja* (handicap)
- *Pelo* (hair)
- *Bolso* (handbag)
- *Dinero* (money)
- *Leer* (read)

I’ve used these examples to better introduce you to the basics. Build upon them and understand their significance. You can use these skills for practically anything. These systems are both flexible and universal. For example, if you want to remember whether a word is masculine or feminine, simply add the picture of a top hat for masculine words and a dress for feminine words. There are no rules, so be creative and outrageous, and have fun with them!

## STACK IT

To learn new vocabulary or foreign-language words, combine the strategy above with methods that you’ve already learned from our chapter on study. For example, we talked about spaced repetition. That would be extremely valuable in this application. We talked about using music. Baroque music is

very effective at helping to learn languages. The study techniques already in your toolkit will serve a bold new purpose here.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

I hope you can see now that having a well-trained memory is an essential part of unlimiting yourself. When your memory is finely tuned, you're exponentially stronger than if you're trying to get by with an untrained memory. This book covers the foundation to jump-start your memory. Visit www.LimitlessBook.com/resources to get the three-part memory training videos as my gift to you. Before we move on to the next chapter, try a few things:

- Think about ways to provide yourself with greater motivation to remember. Simply thinking it would be nice to have a better memory is probably not enough.
- Consider ways in which you can try to be less influenced by distractions when you're in a situation where remembering something might be important. I'm going to give you some tools to help with this later in this book, but what can you do right now to help you focus more?
- Take each of the tools I've provided in this chapter out for a spin. There's a good chance you'll see a noticeable difference in your memory right away.

"The man who
does not read
good books has
no advantage over
the man who
can't read them!"



—MARK TWAIN

# 14

# SPEED READING

**Why is it so important to read?**

**How do I increase my reading focus and comprehension?**

**How can I get more out of every reading experience?**

What do Oprah Winfrey, Thomas Edison, John F. Kennedy, and Bill Gates all have in common? They were all great readers. Leaders are readers.

Welcome to the age of data. Never in history has there been such an information surplus. More information has been produced in the past few decades than in the previous few thousand years. According to Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google, “There were 5 Exabytes of information created between the dawn of civilization through 2003, but that much information is now created every 2 days.” And it’s only getting faster and faster. All of this information makes today’s age extremely competitive. Those people who can keep up with the latest information will have the competitive edge needed to succeed, not only academically and professionally, but in other key areas of life as well.

Studies show that there is a direct relationship between your ability to read and your success in life. Skilled readers enjoy better jobs, higher incomes, and greater opportunities for success in all realms of life. Think about this: If you have average reading skills, then you have the same

understanding that most people have. That doesn't give you much of a competitive advantage, does it?

Unfortunately, for most people reading is regarded as a boring task, something very time-consuming and tedious. Have you ever gone through a page in a book and found yourself asking, "What on earth did I just read?" If the answer is yes, you are not alone.

We've talked before about the challenges I faced early in my college career. As you know, those challenges were so great for me that I seriously considered quitting school altogether. But as I rose to the task of reading a book every week in addition to the reading I needed to do for my classes, I started to make considerable progress with my learning. I didn't realize how much progress I'd made, though, until one surprising day.

Growing up, I've always tried to keep myself out of the spotlight. I was a shy kid, and I felt more comfortable blending into the scenery than being front and center. That continued when I went away to school. Big classes held in lecture halls were especially appealing to me, because I could sit in the corner and avoid being noticed.

I was in one such classroom one day along with a few hundred other students. Up front, the professor was lecturing to us and using an overhead projector to show images. At one point, he put some text up on the projector, and I instantly burst into laughter. This was an entirely natural reaction for me; the quote was funny. But it was otherwise completely quiet in the hall, which caused a huge number of people to swivel their heads in my direction. I'm guessing most of these people would never have been able to identify me as one of their classmates before this moment.

I was hugely embarrassed. I'd made so much effort to be invisible, and now it was as though I'd stormed the stage to draw attention to myself. I was blushing so hard that I thought my face was going to combust, and I shrank back as far as I could.

Then several seconds later, others in the hall started laughing. At first, I thought they were laughing at me, but as more joined them, I looked out and noticed that they weren't staring at me at all; they were reading the text. And that's when I realized the source of my embarrassment: I'd read the words so much faster than my classmates that I'd reacted to it way sooner than everyone else. I'd known I improved the speed at which I read and the level at which I comprehended it, but until that moment I had no idea how rare but learnable an ability it was.

While still feeling a bit awkward about my unintended outburst, I left that class buoyed by the understanding that my learning had risen to an entirely new level. Due to the techniques I'd taught myself, reading had become one of my superpowers, paving the way to enormous breakthroughs in my learning. While I vowed not to laugh so loudly in the future, I walked out of that lecture hall with an incredible sense of excitement about learning and about discovering the other superpowers that were just emerging.

## HOW READING MAKES YOUR BRAIN LIMITLESS

Any plan to make your learning limitless needs to include reading. Just as memory is foundational to nearly all brain function, reading is foundational to nearly all learning. If anyone tells you that they don't read, they're essentially saying, "I've stopped trying to learn." Yes, you can learn something from watching videos, listening to podcasts, or going to the movies. Even the silliest network sitcom is likely to teach you *something*. But it is nearly impossible to make learning a dynamic and renewable part of your life without a dedicated approach to reading. Here's why this is true:

- **Reading kicks your brain into gear.** When you read, you're using your brain for many functions at once—which is a vigorous and rewarding workout. As Dr. Ken Pugh, president and director of research at Haskins Laboratories, points out, "Parts of the brain that have evolved for other functions—such as vision, language, and associative learning—connect in a specific neural circuit for reading, which is very challenging. A sentence is shorthand for a lot of information that must be inferred by the brain."[1] In other words, reading gives you an incomparable level of mental exercise, and the brain is always a "muscle" that gets stronger the more you challenge it.
- **Reading improves your memory.** Because you're giving your brain such a great workout when you read, your brain functions at a higher level. One significant benefit of this is with regard to memory. In a study conducted by Dr. Robert S. Wilson at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, reading was shown to have a meaningful effect on

memory decline. “We shouldn’t underestimate the effects of everyday activities, such as reading and writing, on our children, ourselves, and our parents or grandparents,” he noted. “Our study suggests that exercising your brain by taking part in activities such as these across a person’s lifetime, from childhood through old age, is important for brain health in old age.”[2]

- **Reading improves your focus.** One of the things we do when we sit down with a book or even spend some dedicated time with a newspaper is train our focus on this one thing. Unlike when we browse the Internet or click through YouTube, when we’re reading, we usually give the vast majority of our attention to what we’re reading. This practice makes it easier to apply the same level of focus to other tasks.
- **Reading improves your vocabulary.** Some people just sound smarter. How do you react when you encounter one of these people? In all likelihood, you offer them increased respect and even a certain level of deference. People who sound smart tend to have access to and a facility with a wider vocabulary than the average person. Reading allows you to build vocabulary organically. The more you read, the more you are exposed to an expanded range of language and the use of that language in a variety of contexts. And because reading is such a superior focusing tool, you’re absorbing a great deal of this, and it will be accessible to you as you need it.
- **Reading improves your imagination.** If you were ever given a story prompt at school or at work, you know that it is often easier to think creatively when using a tool to get started. Reading is essentially one story prompt after another. “What would it be like to be in this person’s shoes?” “How can I use this technique to be more productive?” “What am I going to do first, once Jim Kwik helps me become limitless?” A great imagination helps you see more possibilities in your life, and reading keeps your imagination on high alert.
- **Reading improves understanding.** Learning comes in many forms, and learning as a success tool has many elements. And while agile thinking and mastery of skills are critical to success, empathy and understanding can’t be overlooked. Reading exposes you to lives

you'd never known before, experiences you'd never imagined, and modes of thinking far different from your own. All of this builds both your empathy for others and your understanding of how the world works beyond yourself.

***KWIK START***

If you can read faster with greater comprehension and enjoyment, what books would you start reading this month? Create a list of three books you want to start reading.

## READING SELF-ASSESSMENT

The first thing you must do is discover your present reading speed, also known as your base rate. This reading rate is measured in words per minute. In order to measure it, you will need an easy reading novel, a pencil, and a timer. Then do the following:

1. Set an alarm to go off in two minutes.
2. Read at a comfortable speed and stop when the alarm goes off (put a mark where you left off).
3. Count the total number of words in three regular lines, and divide that number by three. This is the average number of words per line.
4. Count the number of lines you just read (only count those lines that at least make it halfway across the page)
5. Multiply the number of words per line by the number of lines you just read (multiply your answers from steps 3 and 4).
6. Divide this number by two (because you read for two minutes) and this is your words per minute. Do this now. It is critical to have this exercise completed before moving on. Write down your current reading speed.

The average person's reading speed can usually be found somewhere between 150 to 250 words per minute. This range varies with the difficulty of the material. If you are reading much below 100 words per minute, the material may be too difficult or you may want to seek remedial help (the skills you learn here will still be of great value).

Let's say a person reads at 200 words per minute. This person reads and studies for four hours a day. A person who reads at 400 words per minute (twice as fast) needs only to study for half as much time. A faster reader saves at least two hours each day.

***KWIK START***

If you can save two hours each day, what would you do with this extra time? Take a moment to write down how you would spend those extra two hours daily.

## CHALLENGES TO READING

People either don't read or choose to read very little for a variety of reasons. You work long hours, and you're exhausted at the end of the day. It's easier to be entertained passively (through television, film, music, etc.) than to engage in the activity required to read. If you're going to work for your entertainment, you'd rather be playing a videogame. I hear you, but if you've absorbed the benefits I just listed above, you know that you need to fit some time into your day—every day—to read.

Another key reason why people don't read is that they find it a laborious process. It can take them five minutes to get through a single page in a book, making the idea of reading a 300-page book akin to walking from New York to Georgia. People tend to read slowly for a few reasons. One is that they stopped learning to read relatively early—maybe second or third grade—and their reading level (and, more importantly, their reading technique) never increased much beyond this, even as they continued to learn in spite of this constraint. The other is that they don't allow themselves to focus when they're reading. They're listening for the kids, half-watching television, checking e-mail every few minutes, and so on.

They therefore find themselves reading the same paragraph over and over again, because they're not focused enough to comprehend what they're reading.

There are a couple of primary reasons why people read slowly. Your reading efficiency is made up of two main parts: Your reading rate (speed) and reading comprehension (understanding). Before we look at various ways to increase your reading efficiency, we first need to look at three of the barriers and obstacles that prevent us from reading more quickly.

## 1. Regression

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever read a line in a book and found yourself rereading that same line again? Or do you ever find yourself "wander reading" (going back mindlessly and rereading words)? *Regression* is a term used to describe the tendency that your eyes have to go back and reread certain words. Almost everyone does it to some degree, and most of the time it is done subconsciously. By doing so, people believe they will increase their comprehension, but usually they hamper it. By regressing, or back-skipping, it is very easy to lose the meaning and essence of your reading. Regression seriously disrupts the reading process as well as slows down reading speed.

## 2. Outdated Skills

Reading is not so much a measure of intelligence as it is a skill and with any skill, it can be learned and improved. When was the last time you took a class called reading? For most, it was back in the 4th or 5th grade. And if you're like most people, your reading skill is probably still the same as it was back then. Here's the challenge: Has the amount and difficulty of what you're reading changed since? The complexity of material has likely increased dramatically, yet our reading skill has remained the same.

## 3. Subvocalization

*Subvocalization* is a fancy word for your inner voice. Do you notice a voice inside that is saying the words as you read this? Hopefully, it's your own voice. Subvocalization limits your reading speed to only a couple hundred

words per minute. That means your reading speed is limited to your talking speed, not your thinking speed. In reality, your mind can read a lot faster.

Where did subvocalization come from? It occurred, for most people, when you were first learning to read. Then it was necessary for you to read out loud so that your teacher knew you were doing it correctly. Do you remember when you would have to get into a circle with the other children and you each took turns reading aloud? For a lot of us, this was a very stressful event. There was a lot of pressure on you to say the word properly. How you pronounced the word was very important. It was then that your brain made the association: If I want to understand a word when I am reading, I must be able to correctly say it.

Later on, you were told to no longer read aloud, but rather silently, to yourself. This is when you internalized that "reading voice," and most of us have been doing it ever since. In essence, you believe if you don't hear the words, then you won't understand the words. This is not the case.

Here's an example: We know that President John F. Kennedy was a very fast reader, reading somewhere between 500 and 1200 words per minute. He brought speed-reading instructors to train his staff. He also gave speeches at approximately 250 words per minute. Clearly, when he was reading, there were a lot of words he wasn't saying in his mind. It is not necessary to say the words in order to understand them.

Take a moment and think about a specific car, yours or someone else's. What does it look like? What color is it? Do this now.

What was it that you thought about? You might have said, "It is blue, has four tires, and brown leather seats." Question: Did the words *blue*, *tires*, or *leather* appear in your mind, or did you picture a car with all of these things? For most of us, our minds think primarily in images, and not words. As we discussed in the previous chapter on memory, words are just a tool we use to communicate our thoughts or pictures.

As you are reading, you can greatly increase both your speed and comprehension by visualizing the material. It is not necessary to "say" all of the words, as it takes too much time, just as you don't read and say "period, comma, question mark," when you see them in a sentence. You wouldn't read a sentence like this: "I just bought some avocados comma blueberries comma and broccoli period." You understand that punctuation marks are just symbols that represent various meanings.

Words are symbols as well. You've seen 95 percent of the words you read before. You don't need to pronounce those words, just as you don't need to pronounce filler words like *because, this,* or *the.* You know them by sight, not by sound. It is the meaning of what the word represents that is important. And the meaning is usually better described and remembered in the form of pictures. Understanding this concept is the first step in reducing subvocalization.

## READING MISCONCEPTIONS

### Myth 1: Faster Readers Don't Comprehend Well

This is a rumor spread around by slow readers, and it is not true. In fact, faster readers often have better comprehension than slower readers. Here's an analogy: When you're taking a slow drive down a quiet street, you can be doing many things. You may be listening to the radio, drinking a green juice, waving to a neighbor, and singing your favorite song. Your attention is not in any one place; it just flows and wanders.

But imagine you're driving pedal to the metal down a racetrack taking hairpin turns. Do you have more focus or less? I would bet that you are very focused on what is in front, behind, and ahead of you. You're not thinking about your dry cleaning. The same holds true for reading. The key to better reading comprehension is focus and concentration. But some people read so slowly that they completely bore their own minds. A bored mind doesn't concentrate well. Your mind can handle vast amounts of information, and yet most people as they read feed it one . . . word . . . at . . . a . . . time. This is starving the brain.

If your mind ever wanders and daydreams, this could be the reason. If you don't give your brain the stimulus it needs, it'll seek entertainment elsewhere in the form of distraction. You may find yourself wondering what you'll have for dinner, what to wear on your date tomorrow, or listening to a conversation out in the hall. We've asked before about reading a page or a paragraph and not remembering what you've just read. It may be because you read so slowly that you bored your brain and it simply lost interest. Or, you may be using reading as a sedative and you fall asleep. By reading faster, you keep your mind stimulated, find yourself more focused, and have better comprehension.

### Myth 2: It's Harder and Takes More Effort to Read Fast

Reading faster requires *less* effort, primarily because trained readers tend not to back-skip as much as slower readers. Slow readers stop at words, reread them, go to another word, regress to a previous one, and so on, and this continues throughout their reading. This takes a lot more effort and is extremely draining and boring. Faster readers go through words much easier and in a lot less time. This makes them more efficient because they put in less time, and get more out of the process!

### Myth 3: Faster Readers Can't Appreciate Reading

This is not true either. You don't have to study the individual brushstrokes of a work of art in order to appreciate it. Likewise, you do not have to study each and every word in a book, to realize its value. One of the best things about being a trained reader is flexibility. Faster readers have the option of speeding through boring/nonessential material and slowing down or even rereading the exciting/important information. Flexibility is power. Faster readers appreciate reading most material because they know it will not take all day.

## VISUAL PACER: GIVE YOUR READING THE FINGER

You were probably told as a child not to use your finger to point to the words when you're reading. The traditional belief is that doing so will slow down your reading. But as children know naturally, using your finger as a guide keeps your eyes focused and prevents them from wandering. Using your finger to read actually increases your reading speed because your eye is attracted to motion.

It is one thing to know this intellectually; it's another for you to experience it. Let's practice using your finger by rereading what you used for your assessment earlier. Start from the beginning and use your finger to track the words. End where you originally left off. Do not worry about comprehension and don't time this because it is just practice. The purpose of this exercise is for you to become familiar with using your finger while reading.

When you are done, set the alarm for two minutes. Start from where you ended during your first assessment. Continue reading until the alarm goes off. Figure out your new reading rate (based on the original formula), and write down your new reading speed.

Studies show that the use of the finger while reading can increase your reading rate anywhere from 25 percent to 100 percent. The more you practice using this technique, the better your results will be. It may be a little awkward at first, just like it was when you first learned how to drive, but be patient and remember that it always takes more effort to sharpen your skills first than it does to bulldoze your way through learning later.

Reading with your finger also introduces another one of your senses, the sense of touch, into the learning process. Much as your sense of smell and sense of taste are closely tied, your sense of sight and sense of touch are also very closely linked. Have you ever tried to show something new to a child? The child's natural instinct is to want to touch the object.

Using your finger also dramatically decreases regression, and is one of the reasons why your reading speed increases with this practice. Your eyes are naturally attracted to motion, so by moving your finger forward, your eyes are much less likely to regress backward.

Practice reading with your finger, this tool alone will significantly increase your speed and comprehension and will revolutionize your learning. If your finger gets tired, practice using your whole arm, moving it back and forth. It's a bigger muscle and will not tire as easily.

# HOW TO READ EVEN FASTER

Here are some more tools that will help you to become an accelerated reader:

### 1. Reading Is Like Exercising

When you go to work out, you cannot expect your muscles to grow if you pamper them. You need to push your muscles to where they are a little uncomfortable in order for them to grow. The same applies to reading. If you push yourself to read faster, your "reading muscles" will become stronger, and what was once hard, becomes easy. You can read faster, simply by training yourself to read faster. Those of you who run know this.

When you are running on a treadmill, if you practice regularly, you can watch yourself run at faster and faster levels. The levels that were once hard become easy a week later, because you have pushed yourself to a higher degree of excellence.

To increase your speed, even more, try this exercise: You will need an easy-reading novel, a pencil, and a watch or timer:

1. Read comfortably (using your finger or a visual pacer) for 4 minutes. Set the alarm to go off in 4 minutes and read as you normally would read. Mark the line when your alarm goes off. This is going to be your "finish line."
2. Now set your alarm for 3 minutes. The goal here is to reach the finish line before your alarm goes off. Then read (using your finger) until the line in step 1 in 3 minutes.
3. Set your alarm for 2 minutes. Don't worry about comprehension. Try to get to the finish line before your alarm goes off in 2 minutes. Use a visual pacer and go through it line by line. Have your eyes follow your finger as fast as possible.
4. Final stretch. Set your timer for 1 minute. Do your best to get to the finish line in one minute. Do not skip any line, and don't worry about comprehension right now.
5. Now breathe. Set your timer for 2 minutes. Start from your finish line to read a new section. Read at a comfortable rate with comprehension. Count the number of lines you read, multiply by the number of words per line, then divide this number by two. This is your new reading rate. Write it down.

How did that feel? By doing this exercise, you will notice that your rate has increased. Here's an analogy: If you are driving on the highway at 65 mph, and then slow down to 40 mph for some mild traffic, you will notice quite a bit of difference. This is because you are used to driving at a higher speed. But in reality, you are not going very slowly, because it is all relative.

The same principle applies to reading. If you push yourself to read two or three times faster than what you are used to, when you finally decrease your rate to a comfortable speed, your original rate feels slow.

You want to practice this 4-minute exercise at least once a day until you reach a level that you are pleased and satisfied with. Schedule your reading. Just as with exercising, you cannot expect to work out only one time and be done for life. You must read on a regular basis, otherwise your reading muscles will grow weak.

## 2. Expand Your Peripheral Vision

Your peripheral vision is the span of letters or words that your eyes can see in a single glance. By increasing your peripheral vision, you will be able to see and take in more words at a time. Most people were taught to read only one word at a time. But in fact, you are capable of reading more than that.

When you first learned to read, you were taught that letters made up larger structures, called words. As a child, you would sound out a word by its letters. For example, the word *report* would be broken down into letters so that you could understand it, *R-E-P-O-R-T.* Now that you are older, you are not as aware of the letters as you are reading, you see the larger units, known as words.

One of the reasons why people have a limited reading speed is because they read one word at a time. But if you put the word *card* at the end of the *report*, you get *REPORT CARD.* These two words have their own distinct meanings, but your mind sees them as one unit. Just as your mind is capable of seeing these two words together, it is also capable of seeing groups of words at the same time. By doing so, you will take your reading speed to even greater heights. Just as you see the words and not the individual letters, skilled readers see groups of words (or ideas) and not the individual words. See Additional tips below that you can use to condition yourself to “see” more.

## 3. Counting

By using the exercises I’ve outlined, the challenge of subvocalization will begin to decrease. The process of reading faster naturally makes it more difficult to say all the words, even inside your head. When you have passed a certain rate (about 300 to 350 words per minute), it will be impossible to subvocalize all the words. As you hit this threshold, your brain will begin to make the shift from saying the words to seeing them more as images. Reading a book will be more like watching a movie.

Counting is another tool you can use to drown out this inner voice. The process is deceptively simple: count out loud as you are reading, “one, two, three . . .” and so on. You’ll find it is very difficult to count out loud and talk inside (subvocalize) at the same time. Doing this process conditions you to subvocalize less, allowing you to see the words rather than say them, thus leading to better speed and comprehension.

People tend to remember and understand what they *see,* more than what they *hear.* This makes sense, as most people can recall someone’s face they see, more than the name they hear. By practicing these other exercises, your reading speed will improve because you are no longer saying every word. Initially, you may be a little confused (and your comprehension may even decrease), but in a very short time, your mind will grow bored of counting and will eventually stop. With practice, your comprehension will soon increase and expand because you will be able to more fully see and understand the material.

## SUCCESS STORIES

I could fill an entire book with speed-reading success stories from students, and we post them regularly on social media. Here’s one we received today. Sarah was a very slow reader, had difficulty focusing, and felt it impossible to remember names and events. After years of struggle in this arena, she was convinced that there was very little chance she’d ever be capable of improving her reading ability or her ability to study.

In my programs, I make it a point to reassure my students that we are not aiming for perfection but for progress, and this resonated with Sarah. She realized she had been looking for complicated solutions, but that the tools and techniques we teach—which are easy to ignore or overlook because they are simple—were the best to use. She decided to show up with dedication and do her best, no matter what doubts she might have.

The results speak for themselves; Sarah’s reading speed is now three times faster—she went from reading 253 words per minute to 838 words per minute. She starts her day by reading, which starts each morning with positive momentum and makes her feel like she’s already achieved something for the day.

Lou, another student, also experienced a profound difference in his reading ability once he learned a technique that could truly help him. Lou excelled at high-level left-brained topics such as engineering and math and obtained a bachelor of science in electrical engineering. But he struggled in every single English class he ever took. Throughout his school years, he had enormous trouble understanding the words he was reading and comprehending the lessons behind them. In fact, he's convinced that he graduated only because his teachers gave him undeserved Cs out of sympathy.

**ADDITIONAL READING TIPS.**

- Hold your book upright. If the book is flat on your desk, you may be doing one of two things, either

    1. looking at the print at an angle versus directly, thus putting unnecessary strain on your eyes, or
    2. you will be slouched over in order to see the print clearly, and this (as you know) disrupts the flow of oxygen through your body and makes you feel tired.

- Read for only 20 to 25 minutes at a time. Remember primacy and regency. Also, if your eyes ever get tired or feel strained, take a break. Close your eyes and let them rest.
- Make reading a habit. Those who have reached a high degree of success in life are almost always avid readers. Great readers read often. The key is to make reading a habit. Give yourself this gift.

When he was 35, Lou began to take lessons to learn how to read. These were helpful, but he still found himself at a second-grade reading level after four years of work. This was a vast improvement from where he had been, but it wasn't nearly what he wanted, and he continued to be frustrated with his inability to master words and concepts. A big part of the problem was

that he had been trying to learn by rote memorization—reading the same passages over and over in the hope that he would absorb what he was reading. But he consistently found himself having learned nothing by the end of the page.

While he had made significant progress, finding programs was the key for Lou. As our memory program taught him how to absorb the material he was reading, he began to take a little more time to visualize words as he read them, and he used his left hand as a pacer to help stimulate the right side of his brain. Finally, for the first time, he found himself reading books and understanding them.

***KWIK START***

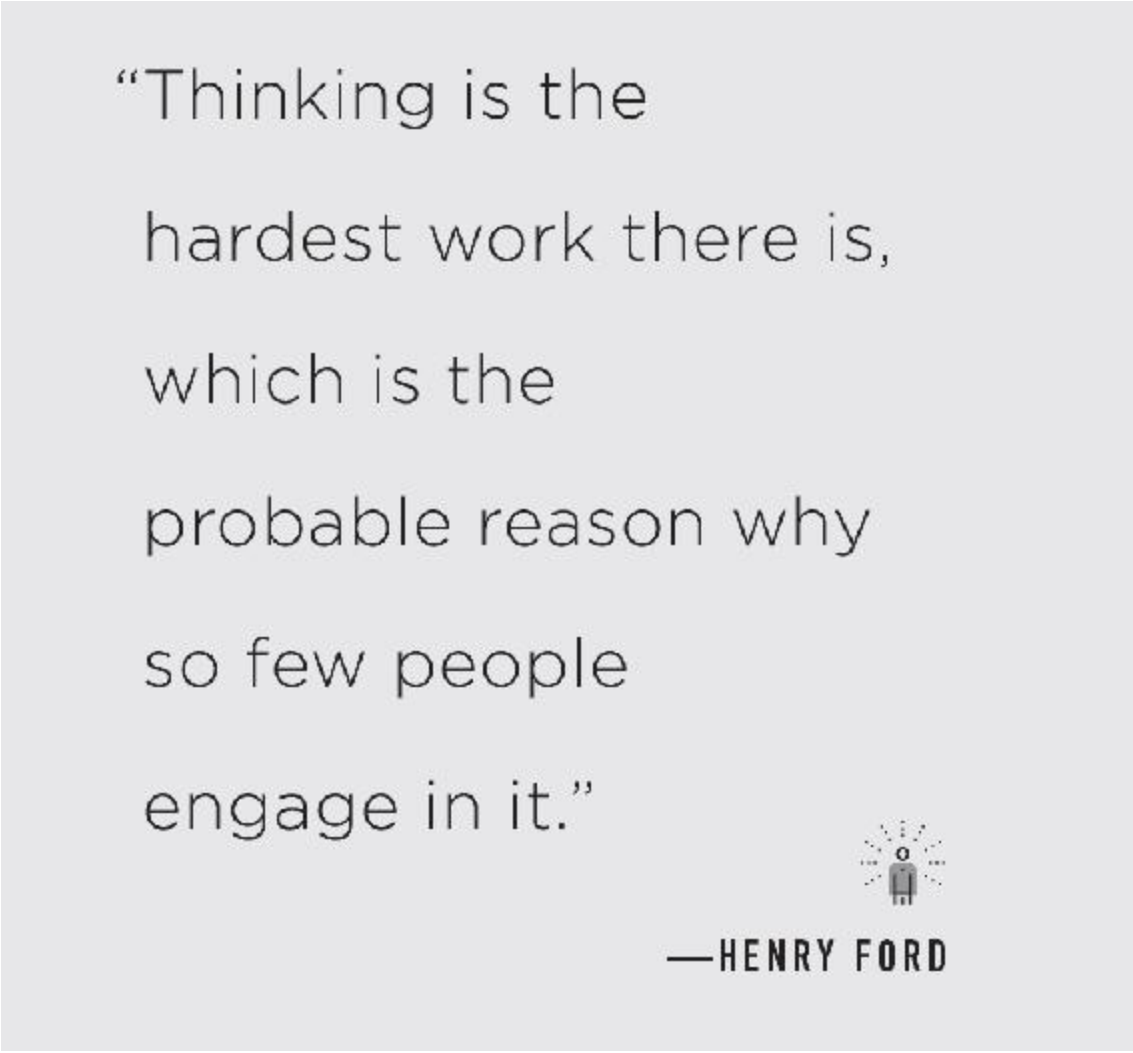
Block out at least 15 minutes each day for reading and put it in your calendar like an important appointment. Commit to making reading part of your daily habit.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

Unlimiting your reading and learning will offer you an unparalleled level of freedom. People who make the most of their capacity to learn find themselves experiencing the world with a sense of mastery and with the confidence that no task or challenge will intimidate them. Visit www.LimitlessBook.com/resources and put what you learned here into practice. You can watch an hour speed-reading masterclass where I walk you through these methods. Before we get to the next chapter, try a few things:

- Identify a current reading habit that you'd like to change. Any transformation requires you to acknowledge what's holding you back and notice when it shows up during your practice.
- Practice reading with a visual pacer each day. Schedule your reading, for even 10 minutes each day, to build your "reading muscle."
- Make a list of the books you would like to read this month and write down what can change in your life when you finish reading them.

- Take my speed-reading online masterclass (free) at www.jimkwik.com/reading.



# 15

# THINKING

**Why is it important to think from a variety of perspectives?**

**What are the various ways people use their intelligence?**

**What kinds of superpowers can you harness by thinking differently?**

Accomplishing something big often requires new approaches to thinking. An observation usually attributed to Albert Einstein posits, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” And this of course makes perfect sense. So often, we adopt a particular perspective at work, in our home lives, and in our studies, and that outlook effectively walls out any approach that doesn’t fit into that viewpoint. But there are two key problems with that. One is that all perspectives should be challenged on a regular basis to confirm that they are still viable. For example, so often when a company goes out of business, it’s later shown that it was so completely mired in one approach to the marketplace that it wasn’t capable of seeing that the audience they were targeting was no longer as responsive as they once were. The second problem a fixed perspective faces is that challenges are often the product of a particular type of thinking, and the answer can be found only by bringing a fresh approach to the table.

Why do most of us have a restricted range of thinking? I think the answer is the same as it was when we were discussing focus: because we somehow missed out on “thinking class” when we were in school. Fortunately, it’s

never too late to attend that class, and I'm going to enroll you in it right now.

## THE THINKING HATS

Dr. Edward de Bono devised the concept of the "six thinking hats" as a tool for getting out of whatever rut of thinking one might be mired in.[1] Regularly used to help groups problem-solve in a more productive way, it is easily adaptable by any individuals hoping to keep their thinking fresh. The core notion is to separate thinking into six distinctly defined functions by progressively donning a series of metaphorical hats:

- You put on a **white hat** when you're in information-gathering mode. At this point, your focus is on collecting details and getting all the facts you'll need to address whatever issue you're trying to address. To help you remember this, think of a white lab coat.
- You switch to a **yellow hat** to bring optimism to your thinking. Here, you're trying to identify the positives in any problem or challenge you're facing, highlighting the value inherently in place. As your memory tip here, think of the yellow sun.
- Next, you'll wear a **black hat** to pivot from looking at the good side of the challenge to facing its difficulties and pitfalls. This is where you'll come face to face with the consequences of failing to successfully address a problem. Memory tip: Think about a judge's robe.
- Once you've done that, don your **red hat** to allow emotion to come into play. This is the point where you can let your feelings about the problem come to the surface, and maybe even express fears. This is also where you can allow speculation and intuition to enter into the conversation. To remember this, think about a red heart.
- Now it's time for the **green hat.** When you're wearing this hat, you're in creativity mode. You've looked at the problem analytically and you've looked at it emotionally. Now ask yourself, what new ideas can you bring to what you already know about the problem? How can you come at it in a way you haven't considered before? Memory tip: Think about green grass.

- Finally, wear the **blue hat** to be in management mode, and make sure you've addressed your agenda productively and gone through the process in a way that benefits from all the other hats you've worn. Often, organizations will start with the blue hat to set goals for a meeting and then put it on again at the end. Even if you're using the six hats by yourself, this is something you might want to consider. To remember this, think about blue skies.

The De Bono approach to problem-solving is an ingenious and elegantly organized method for getting the most from your thinking. At its core, it is a neatly defined way of looking at an issue from all sides. First, you make sure you're clear on what you need to address. Then, you determine that you have all the facts in front of you. Next, you make sure you're dealing with the issue with a positive perspective. Then, you get real about the challenges you're facing, and allow yourself to feel what you're feeling about it. After this, you allow yourself to attack the problem from perspectives you might not have considered before, letting your imagination run free. And then you circle back to make sure you've addressed what you set out to address during this session.

Look at how many different ways you've used your brain for this one task. You've been analytical, you've been emotional, and you've been creative. You've explored the sunny side and the dark side. And you've almost certainly attacked the issue with tools you don't automatically use every single day (though you might from now on). Einstein would be proud of you.

### *KWIK START*

Think of a problem you need to be solved right now. It can be anything from "How can I get that job," to "How can I communicate better with my family?" Use the Six Thinking Hats model to run through the different perspectives of looking at the problem you're trying to solve.

# HOW ARE YOU SMART?

Why is it important for us to have tools to help us think in different ways? Because people usually have a dominant way of using their intelligence. Dr. Howard Gardner, professor of cognition and education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has studied intelligence extensively and has identified eight distinct forms of intelligence:[2]

1. **Spatial :** This is someone who usually thinks from the perspective of the space around them. Airline pilots tend to be spatial thinkers, but so do people who excel at playing chess, as both require an innate understanding of how things fit into space. The artist Claude Monet comes to mind as another example because of his remarkable use of space in his paintings.
2. **Bodily-Kinesthetic:** Someone with a dominance of this form of intelligence uses their body as a form of expression or problem-solving. Gymnasts have refined bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, as do drummers. The first name that jumps into my head when I think of this form of intelligence is Venus Williams, who expressed her genius with her body on a tennis court in ways that very few ever have.
3. **Musical :** This is a person with a strong "sensitivity to rhythm, pitch, meter, tone, melody and timbre."[3] Musicians obviously have a dominance in musical intelligence, but you'll also find it in poets, who often use meter and rhythm as effectively as they use words. My poster child for musical intelligence is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.
4. **Linguistic:** Someone with a dominance in linguistic intelligence is particularly attuned to all the implications of words, not just their strict dictionary definition. Writers of course have this trait, but so do great orators and lawyers. The first person I think of with linguistic intelligence is William Shakespeare.
5. **Logical-Mathematical:** This is a strength in seeing the "logical relations among actions or symbols."[4] Mathematicians find themselves very comfortable seeing or seeking the connections between different numbers. Scientists likewise draw connections between physical objects or the forces acting on objects. Our friend Albert Einstein immediately leaps to mind as a prime example.

6. **Interpersonal :** Someone with a dominance in interpersonal intelligence has a deep innate ability to connect with other people and a rich understanding of how others might be feeling at any given moment. Therapists tend to have strong interpersonal intelligence, as do schoolteachers. When I think of interpersonal intelligence, I think of Oprah Winfrey, because of her amazing ability to relate to whomever she is speaking with.
7. **Intrapersonal :** If you have dominance in intrapersonal intelligence, you have a particularly refined sense of what is going on inside of you. People with strong intrapersonal intelligence do a great job of "taking their own temperature." They're in touch with their feelings, they know what triggers them, and they have a good sense of how to manage this. If you know someone who is cool under even difficult circumstances, it's likely that this person has strong intrapersonal intelligence.
8. **Naturalistic:** This kind of intelligence expresses itself in an ability to see the world of nature in all its complexities. Where you might see a field of flowers, someone with this dominance will see four different kinds of tulips, a couple of varieties of lavender, and a rare grass that you just thought was a weed. Zoologists tend to have a dominance in naturalistic intelligence, as do landscape architects. The first person with this trait who comes to my mind is the remarkable primatologist Jane Goodall.

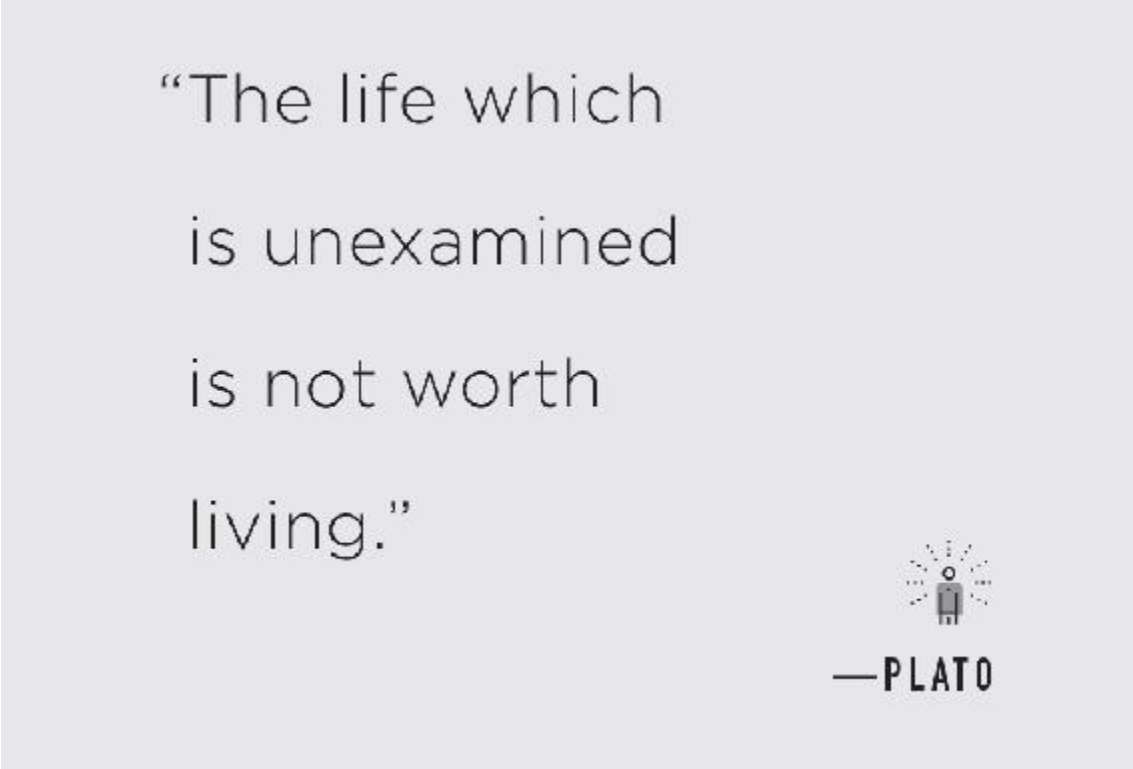
Do you see yourself in one of these descriptions? There's a good chance you'll relate to more than one, because people rarely have only one form of intelligence. It's likely you have a dominance in one or two, and there may be a couple of others that you employ with some regularity. At the same time, you'll almost certainly find some on the list that you use rarely, if at all.

But all of these forms of intelligence identify successful ways of operating in the world, and any one of them might come into play when you're facing a particular task or problem. Awareness of all eight, and considering each while wearing your six thinking hats, is a remarkably effective way to unlimit your thinking.

# WHAT IS YOUR LEARNING STYLE?

Just as types of intelligence vary from person to person, the way one learns varies. The VAK learning styles model has been in use since the 1920s and is useful in showing you how you prefer to learn new things:

- **V is for Visual,** meaning that you tend to learn through illustrations, charts, video, and other visual media.
- **A is for Auditory,** meaning that you find yourself most comfortable learning by listening, either to a lecture, a discussion, a podcast, an audiobook, etc.
- **K is for Kinesthetic,** meaning that you prefer to learn via physical interaction. Kinesthetic learners tend to gain more from taking a hands-on approach to learning.[5]



Here's a quick quiz you can take to give you a sense of what kind of learner you are (see eBook Supplemental Material for a downloadable PDF version):

1. **When you don't quite understand or remember something:**
    a. It doesn't ring a bell or resonate
    b. It seems hazy or unclear
    c. You can't get a handle on it or feel it
2. **You are about to give a friend directions to your home. Would you:**
    a. Draw a map on paper?
    b. Tell her the directions?
    c. Pick her up in your car?
3. **You are staying in a hotel and have a rental car. You would like to visit a friend whose address you do not know. Would you like them to:**
    a. Draw you a map?
    b. Tell you directions?
    c. Pick you up in their car?
4. **Learning technical material is easiest for you when:**
    a. Someone explains the ideas to you
    b. You visualize the concepts and see the whole picture
    c. You can learn by doing or get a feel for the ideas
5. **You are going to cook a dessert as a special treat for your family. Do you:**
    a. Cook something familiar?

b. Look through a cookbook for ideas?

c. Ask for the advice of others?

6. **You are about to purchase a new sound system. Other than the price, what would most influence your decision?**

    a. A friend speaking about it

    b. How it makes you feel

    c. Its distinctive look or appearance

7. **Recall a time in your life when you learned how to do something like playing a new board game. Try to avoid choosing a very physical skill like riding a bike. How did you learn best? By:**

    a. Looking at the directions, pictures, diagrams, or charts

    b. Listening to somebody explain it

    c. Doing it

8. **Which of these games to you prefer?**

    a. Pictionary

    b. 20 Questions

    c. Charades

9. **You are about to learn how to use a new program on a computer. Would you:**

    a. Read the instructions?

    b. Call a friend and ask questions about it?

    c. Turn it on and learn by experimentation?

10. **You most easily are aware of and notice:**

    a. The quality of music from a sound system

b. If colors, shapes, or patterns clash

c. If clothes feel uncomfortable

11. **You are not sure whether a word should be spelled “separate” or “seperate.” Do you:**

    a. See the word in your mind and choose the best way it looks?

    b. Sound it out?

    c. Write down both versions?

12. **A new movie has arrived in town. What would most influence your decision to go or not go?**

    a. Friends/family talking about it

    b. You have an intuition or sense about it

    c. You saw a preview of it

13. **You most easily remember directions when you:**

    a. Repeat them to yourself as you hear them

    b. Visualize them

    c. Intuitively sense how to get there

14. **Do you prefer a teacher or trainer who likes to use:**

    a. Handouts, flow diagrams, charts, and visuals?

    b. Field trips, experiments, and applications?

    c. Discussions, guest speakers, and conversations?

15. **Once you completely understand a new idea:**

    a. It is now concrete, or you have a feel for it

    b. You have it loud and clear

    c. You can envision it

16. **You make decisions best when you rely on:**

    a. Your gut instinct
    b. What looks clearest to you
    c. What sounds best to you

17. **At a party, you are most interested in people who**

    a. Are interesting and articulate speakers
    b. Convey a warm and relaxing feeling
    c. Radiate a visual beauty

Once you've written down your answers, use this key to see which type of learning comes most naturally to you:

**1:** a (A) b (V) c (K),
**2:** a (V) b (A) c (K),
**3:** a (V) b (A) c (K),
**4:** a (A) b (V) c (K),
**5:** a (K) b (V) c (A),
**6:** a (A) b (K) c (V),
**7:** a (V) b (A) c (K),
**8:** a (V) b (A) c (K),
**9:** a (V) b (A) c (K),
**10:** a (A) b (V) c (K),
**11:** a (V) b (A) c (K),
**12:** a (A) b (K) c (V),
**13:** a (A) b (V) c (K),
**14:** a (V) b (K) c (A),
**15:** a (K) b (A) c (V),
**16:** a (K) b (V) c (A),
**17:** a (A) b (K) c (V)

Your answers will give you a good sense of the kind of learner you are. In all likelihood, you'll be some mix of audio (A), visual (V), and kinesthetic (K). But you might see a real dominance in one of these, and that can prove to be extremely useful as you embark on unlimiting your thinking, as you can make a conscious effort to bring the others into the mix.

# MENTAL MODELS

Mental models are constructs for thinking that help us make sense of the world around us. Think of them as shortcuts. For example, we've all heard of the economic mental model of supply and demand. You're probably familiar with the idea that supply is representative of the amount of something available within a market, whether that's a service, product, or commodity. When that is juxtaposed against the demand for that item, value is determined, and that often dictates the price of the item. This model is a quick way to understand what's happening in a market. It's not always accurate and doesn't explain every factor involved, but it serves as a simple way of evaluating the price or value of an item.

Mental models train your mind to think; after all, you don't rise to the level of your expectations, you fall to the level of your training. Models can act as shortcuts that save you valuable energy and time when you're evaluating an idea, making a decision, or problem-solving.

In the following pages, I'm including some of my favorite mental models for faster and sharper decision-making and for creative problem-solving.

## Decision-Making: The 40/70 Rule

One of the greatest barriers to quick decision-making is the ever-present feeling that we don't have enough information to make the "right" decision. Colin Powell, former secretary of state, addresses this with his 40/70 rule.[6] His rule is to never make a decision with less than 40 percent of the information you are likely to get, and to gather no more than 70 percent of the information available. According to Powell, anything less than 40 percent and you're just guessing. Anything more than 70 percent and you're stalling over making the decision. Of course, this means you need to be

comfortable with the possibility that you're going to be wrong, which is necessary in any case.

"When you have about seventy percent of all the information, you probably ought to decide, because you may lose an opportunity. My own experience is that you get as much information as you can and then you pay attention to your intuition, to your informed instinct. Sometimes what my analytical mind says to me is not what I'll do," Powell said.[7]

## Productivity: Create a Not-to-Do List

This one might seem counterintuitive, but sometimes it's just as important to know what *not* to do as what to do. This tactic is used best for directing your attention to the essentials and avoiding what doesn't matter in the moment.

Often at the beginning of a project, or even just a packed day, it can feel overwhelming to decide what to concentrate on. The power of the not-to-do list is that you decide from the very beginning what you will definitely put aside. When we write down our list of tasks for the day, we usually don't prioritize, nor do we assign a value to these tasks. It's easy for a conventional to-do list to become a catchall for all the things we know we have to do that day, instead of the things that must be done first, for the most value.

Lest you think that the not-to-do list is filled with things like participating in social media, let's work out exactly how you should compile this list:

- First, write down tasks that might be important but can't be done because of outside circumstances. Maybe you're waiting for an e-mail from someone else, or you're waiting for a colleague to finish their portion of a project.
- Next, include tasks that you think need to be done but that don't add value to your life; you might also think of these as busywork. You might ask yourself if you can delegate or hire someone else to do them. You can also ask if anyone but you will notice whether the task is left undone. The idea here is that your time is best spent on tasks that will move your life and goals forward.

- Then include current and ongoing tasks that don't benefit from additional attention. This might include systems that are already set up, such as making the kids' lunches or having a brief meeting with your team at the start of the work day. These are part of your routine and shouldn't be clogging your to-do list on a daily basis.
- Last, include urgent tasks that are often to-do lists given to us by other people, such as getting some background research on a project or making follow-up calls. These are tasks that might be necessary to do but perhaps don't need to be done by you.[8]

When you're finished with your don't-do list, it should read like an anti-menu, a list of items that aren't available for your time. You will then be able to easily identify what will actually move you forward and do those activities instead.

***KWIK START***

Do this right now. Take a moment to create your *not*-to-do list for today. What are the things you need to avoid today to focus and achieve your goals? Be specific and check off that list by not doing it.

## Problem-Solving: Study Your Errors

When we take the time to study the mistakes we make, especially those that have a lasting effect on our lives, we turn every mistake into a learning opportunity. Use this model to evaluate what went wrong so you can get a better result next time.

- First, get clear on what did or didn't happen. Often, we confuse cause with correlation, so be sure you understand what happened and what led to the mistake or error.
- Next, ask yourself why those mistakes happened. Look for the deeper layers behind the incident. You might ask "why" until you've run out of layers to question.

- Then ask how you can best avoid the same mistakes in the future. If some of the factors that caused the error are out of your control, ask how you can prevent causes that can't be eliminated.
- Finally, using what you've gleaned from this exercise, determine how you can create the best conditions to support your desired outcomes in the future.[9]

To help illustrate this strategy, let's imagine this scenario: the fundraising project you orchestrated for your child's school greatly underperformed your expectations. First, you need to be clear on what happened. Did you and your team fail to inspire people to give, or did the donors fail to show up? In this case, let's assume that the donors were available, but they didn't give as much as you anticipated or sometimes didn't give at all.

Now, you need to ask yourself why. Did it have something to do with the way you presented the need? Did it have something to do with the time of year? Did it have something to do with the economy? Remember that your answer here might lead to additional questions. In the scenario we're playing out, let's determine that you decide that you might not have emphasized the importance of this campaign, because there'd been a fundraiser at the school only two months prior and you didn't want to appear pushy, and that your being overly polite caused potential donors to think the cause wasn't critical.

So, how do you avoid this in the future? You decide that the next time you run the campaign, you're going to do it earlier in the school year and, regardless of the proximity of any other fundraiser, you're going to go out of your way to stress the value and importance of this one and why donors need to open up their checkbooks. The upshot of this is that you realize that you need to improve the way you send out the message about your campaign, and you determine to take a class on this so you will be much better prepared when next year's campaign comes along.

### Strategy: Second-Order Thinking

Most of us think about the consequences of our actions, but few of us think even two steps beyond the immediate effects our actions will have on our lives. Let's consider Ryan Holiday's book, *Conspiracy*, which describes how entrepreneur Peter Thiel planned and executed a takedown of one of

America's most prolific (and disliked) online magazines, *Gawker*.[10] Thiel's desire to confront *Gawker* was born after the mag outed him as gay. But he did not act immediately. Over the course of 10 years, he and a team strategically made one move after the next based on a plan they had devised to destroy *Gawker* for good. Regardless of what you think about Thiel's actions, they were definitely not the product of impulsive thinking. This is an example of second-order thinking, the ability to think strategically through a series of events.

This model is simple and yet not always easy. To use second-order thinking when considering future actions:

- Always ask yourself, "And then what?"
- Think in increments of time. What do the consequences look like in five days? Five months? Five years?
- Draw out the possible courses of action you might take using columns to organize consequences.[11]

First-order thinking is easy, but it's second-order thinking that allows us to go deeper through time and consequences. Best of all, it allows us to see what others can't see.

## TAKING GIANT LEAPS

Moving forward incrementally is a significant sign of progress. Every step you can take in the process of becoming limitless is a step in the right direction. But what if you could move your genius forward *exponentially*? After all, if we take 30 normal steps forward, we'll wind up somewhere down the street. But if we took 30 exponential steps, we'd circle the Earth more than two dozen times. That's the kind of thinking advocated by Naveen Jain, winner of the Albert Einstein Technology Medal and founder of some of the most innovative companies in the world, including Moon Express (the first private company to be authorized to land on the moon), World Innovation Institute, iNome, TalentWise, Intelius, and Infospace.

"Exponential thinking is when you start to see things from a different mindset," Jain told me. "It's not about thinking outside the box; it's about thinking in a completely different box."[12] This is where normal genius

begins to border on limitless genius. As Jain explains, linear thinking (the kind of thinking most of us employ) causes us to look at a problem and seek a solution. We might come at the problem from a number of angles. We might put on different hats to address the problem in ways that stretch our thinking. And we might even come up with a solution that addresses the problem effectively and moves us forward. That's all meaningful progress.

But what if we looked at the root cause of the problem and solved that instead? This would lead to exponential progress, world-changing progress. Jain uses as an example the lack of fresh water in many parts of the world. One could attempt to tackle that problem from a number of viewpoints, including finding ways to improve filtration and creating systems for moving fresh water from places where it was abundant to places where it was scarce. But what if instead you identified that, among the various causes for fresh-water scarcity, the biggest is that so much fresh water is being used for agriculture rather than drinking? You would attempt to solve the problem in an entirely different way. What if you could use significantly less water for agriculture, perhaps through some combination of aeroponics, aquaponics, or other techniques currently being experimented with or not yet invented? This would result in such an abundance of fresh water that the original problem would become eminently solvable. That's exponential thinking at work, and the value of it is obvious.

When Jain started his company Viome, his goal was to attack the pervasive nature of chronic illness, which he sees as underlying the world's health crisis. Understanding that every individual's immune system is different and therefore how each person processes the foods they consume can vary greatly, he and his team developed a tool for analyzing an individual's gut microbiome so a person can "Get to the bottom of what foods are right for your body and discover how optimizing the activity of your gut can dramatically improve the condition of your health."[13] As I write this, they're in the process of collecting information from a huge number of users, data that will lead to powerful recommendations for every individual who employs the tool.

Naveen Jain operates at the grandest of scales. He's a successful entrepreneur who has never started two companies in the same industry, and one of his operating principles is that creating a billion-dollar company is *simply* a matter of solving a $10-billion problem. Now, most of us don't think on such a massive scale, but you can still use exponential thinking to

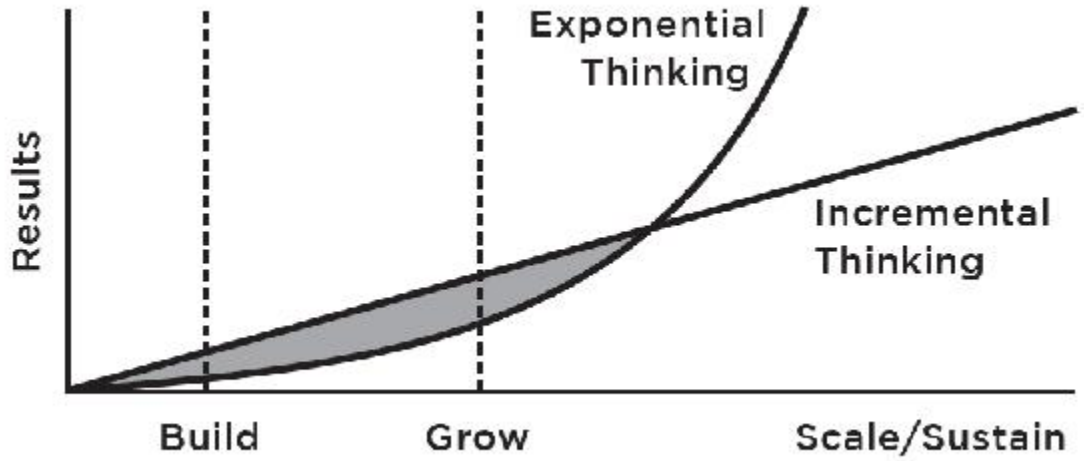
exercise your mind and unlimit your personal genius. To learn more about Viome and watch my interview with Naveen Jain, visit www.JimKwik.com/Viome.

## THINKING EXPONENTIALLY

So, how does an individual think exponentially? Maybe your goal isn't to solve all the world's problems, invent a new technology, or start a billion-dollar company, but you can see how applying exponential thinking might make a real difference to your school, your business, or your personal growth. How can thinking less linearly and more exponentially make dramatic changes in your life?

The first step is having a good understanding of what the exponential mindset looks like. In a piece for the *Harvard Business Review,* Mark Bonchek, founder and chief epiphany officer of Shift Thinking, describes the linear mindset as a line appearing on a graph that rises gradually over time. He then juxtaposes this with a second line that curves upward, slowly at first, and then shooting over the other line before heading far off the graph. This is his visual depiction of the exponential mindset.

**Phase of a Business**



“The incremental mindset focuses on making something *better*, while the exponential mindset is focused on making something *different*,” he notes. “Incremental is satisfied with 10 percent. Exponential is out for 10X.”[14]

“The incremental mindset draws a straight line from the present to the future,” Bonchek continues. “A ‘good’ incremental business plan enables you to see exactly how you will get from here to there. But exponential models are not straight. They are like a bend in the road that prevents you from seeing around the corner, except in this case the curve goes up.”

Bonchek is speaking specifically about applying exponential thinking to business, but the same perception can be brought to bear on thinking in other parts of life. Imagine, for example, that you were trying to figure out how to have everyone in your family at the dinner table at least three times a week. A linear mindset would involve looking at everyone’s work schedules, school schedules, activities schedules, and social schedules to try to find a way to clear out some space. But an exponential mindset would take the approach of turning your family’s harried schedules into something different.

Maybe “dinner” isn’t the goal at all, but rather finding key moments during the week when everyone can be in the same place and focus exclusively on each other. Maybe the issue isn’t your schedules at all but how each of you has chosen to commit their time. Progress might not seem much like progress (three months later, you’re barely better off than when you started), but then the changes you’ve been developing start to take shape, and suddenly you have lots more time together.

If you want to fire up your exponential thinking ability—and take a huge step toward unlimiting your genius—consider these four steps the next time you contemplate a problem or task in need of a solution:

## Step 1: Get to the Underlying Problem

As Naveen Jain illustrated when addressing the world’s water problem, the core issue might not be the surface issue at all. As Jain noted, the underlying problem behind the shortage of fresh water isn’t the availability of the water, but rather that so much fresh water is being used for agricultural purposes. Solving the underlying problem allows for a much more workable solution to the surface problem.

Let’s go back to our dinner scenario. The surface problem is that the family rarely eats dinner together because everyone’s schedules are too busy. The underlying problem might be that your schedules are so busy because your spouse feels compelled to work long hours at work, your daughter feels compelled to be an elite athlete, your son feels compelled to get perfect academic scores so he can attend a college with a 3 percent acceptance rate, and you feel compelled to sit on three nonprofit boards. But maybe even that is not the true underlying problem.

Maybe what’s really at issue is that you each feel the pressures you feel not because you personally aspire to these goals but rather because you live in a community that looks down on people who don’t have goals of this sort.

### Step 2: Posit a New Approach

One of the keys to exponential thinking is filling your thoughts with what-if statements. Evie Mackie of the Innovation Hub at the John Lewis Partnership says that “‘What If’ statements come into play to bring unruly scenarios into the picture. For example, ‘What if the human race needed to adapt and live in a world which was 90 percent underwater’ or ‘What if we could no longer touch things with our hands to interact.’ This helps conceptualize a WHOLE different array of things we may never have thought of otherwise and allows us to imagine what we would need to survive in a future world, which could be a very different place.”[15]

In our example, if you’ve realized the underlying problem is that the prevailing notions in your community have forced you into filling your daily lives with activities that take far too much of your time, you might ask yourselves, “What if we didn’t care what everyone else thought?” Or maybe you’d ask, “What if there were only 18 hours in the day instead of 24?” Or you might even ask, “What if we lived somewhere else?”

### Step 3: Read about It

As you already know, I am an extremely strong advocate for reading as much as you possibly can. Reading liberates your brain more than virtually any other activity. Reading is especially important when it comes to exponential thinking. You can’t make huge cognitive leaps if you don’t have a well-rounded view of a subject.

So, now that you've gone through the what-if exercise, read up on alternatives. Maybe your spouse reads a number of books about the connection between corporate success and happiness. Maybe your daughter connects with bloggers and influencers on both the odds of becoming an elite athlete and the lives of elite athletes. Maybe your son reads a number of studies that look at graduation from ultra-competitive universities and occupational and emotional success afterward. Maybe you read books about the causes you're championing via your nonprofits and reconsider how important these causes are to you.

### Step 4: Extrapolate

You've now identified the underlying problem, posed questions that allow you to imagine a world without the problem, and done your research. Now, it's time to try out a scenario. Let's play one out here: You're convinced that you've filled your lives with activities because you need these to maintain your status in your community. You've asked the question, "What if we lived somewhere else?" and found that everyone in your family is intrigued by this notion. You've done your reading and discovered that you could be happier and more satisfied if your job/sports/school/philanthropic goals were revised and reconceived.

So, what would happen if you moved a hundred miles away, across the country, or even to a different country? You know that doing something this dramatic might not immediately seem like progress. You've seen the straight line and the curved line, and you realize that it might even seem you've taken a huge step backward because of all the adjustments you'd need to make. But say the four of you play out the scenarios and decide that making a move is the right thing to do. Two years later, the family is thriving —and you have dinner together nearly every night.

## BEFORE WE MOVE ON

This is the last of the method chapters, and I'm sure you're itching to put everything you've learned in this book to use. Before we end, I'm going to give you a vision of how this might work for you and a 10-day plan to jump-start applying what you've learned to your life. But before we get to that, let's try a few things:

- Review Howard Gardner’s eight forms of intelligence starting on HOW ARE YOU SMART?. Which forms on this list align most closely with your own intelligence?
- Now that you know what your learning style is, what can you do to incorporate the other styles into your thinking?
- Try on all six thinking hats during a test case. Give yourself a relatively simple task, and approach it using Edward de Bono’s method.

"We shall not cease
from exploration
And the end of all
our exploring
Will be to arrive
where we started
And know the place
for the first time."



—T. S. ELIOT

# AFTERWORD

## RETURN OF THE POSSIBLE

If you're anything like the overwhelming majority of people in the world, when you started reading this book you were being governed—either consciously, unconsciously, or both—by a suite of limitations you'd either imposed on yourself or others had imposed on you.

Maybe you wanted to learn a new ability, but you were sure that you didn't have the capacity to do it. Maybe you wanted to throw your hat in the ring for a big work promotion, but your inner voice kept telling you that you really didn't have the competence for it. Maybe you were convinced that you were always going to leave the house without your phone, or you were never going to remember all the names of the people at your next social gathering, or you were forever going to be the boring guy reading his speech from a piece of paper. If this has ever described you in any way, now that you've come to the end of this book, I hope you're ready to wave goodbye to that person.

Instead, let's meet the new limitless you.

The limitless you has a limitless mindset. You no longer believe that there are all sorts of things you can't be, or do. There might be all sorts of things you *haven't done yet*, and there might be all sorts of things that you've had trouble doing in the past, but the limitless you knows your past doesn't equal your future. The limitless you understands that your brain is a much more powerful tool than you might have previously imagined and that, by setting your mind to learning whatever you want to learn, you can conquer just about any skill.

The limitless you also has limitless motivation. In the past, maybe you could conceive of a more ambitious life, but you couldn't actually get yourself to take action. Now, though, you know how to align your habits

with your ambitions; you're capable of making a commitment to lifelong learning and lifelong improvement and it's as natural to you as getting dressed in the morning.

You also know how to fuel your brain with food and sleep and exercise so that you start your day in the best place, and you're always ready to take on new and demanding challenges. And you know how to tap into the flow so that, once you start a task, you can dive into it completely. And, perhaps most significantly, the limitless you has unlocked the methods of learning how to learn. By discovering this, you have become exponentially more powerful than you were before. Beyond a few physical limitations, if you can learn it, you can do it. And the tools you now have at your disposal allow you to learn anything faster. When you couple that with the skills you've gained in unlimiting your focus, your memory, your thinking, and your reading, you're in possession of the ultimate superhero toolkit.

A superhero is not just someone who has discovered and developed their superpowers. Every superhero must eventually return to their world and serve. They must bring with them the lessons and wisdom they won through their journey. They must not only integrate their powers into their lives, but they must learn to use their powers to help others. At the end of *The Matrix*, Neo has won the battle and broken free of limits. In his last phone call to the Matrix, Neo says: "I'm going to hang up this phone, and then I'm going to show these people what you don't want them to see. I'm going to show them a world without you. A world without rules or controls, borders or boundaries. A world where anything is possible." He's returning to the ordinary world, but with a mission to help inspire others, to free their minds.

My hope for you is that you not only take what you've learned in this book and make your life better with it, but that you make the lives of those around you better, too. The formula is: Learn. Earn. Return. No hero's journey is exclusively for the benefit of the hero. With your newfound knowledge, help those around you to learn better and faster and unlimit themselves.

In the film *Lucy*, an American student played by Scarlett Johansson develops superhuman powers after the full potential of her brain is unleashed. Professor Norman, played by Morgan Freeman, is a neurologist who helps Lucy cope with the startling changes taking place in her mind

and body. When asked by Lucy what to do with her new gifts, Professor Norman replied in Morgan Freeman's unique voice:

> You know . . . If you think about the very nature of life—I mean, in the very beginning, the development of the first cell divided into two cells—the sole purpose of life has been to pass on what was learned. There was no higher purpose. So if you're asking me what to do with all this knowledge you're accumulating, I say . . Pass it on.

So, now the question becomes this: What are you going to do with what you've learned? Solve a challenging problem at work so you and your colleagues have an impact on your industry, and maybe your world? Start a book club? Make a dent in that huge stack of periodicals on your coffee table, and then teach your children what you've just learned? Connect with people in more dynamic ways? Throw a brain-food dinner party? Sign up for the class that is going to open new doors for you? Or maybe sign up to teach a class yourself? Which would you choose?

That's what a superhero would do. That's what the limitless you *can* do.

Throughout this book, you've had the opportunity to take some of your new skills out for a spin. In the pages that follow, I've laid out a program to get you started. Now is the time to start to use all of what you've learned in concert. Start with one thing, but start somewhere. Anywhere. And when you do, I think you're going to be stunned by what you uncover about yourself. The limitless you is the person you truly are and the person who, over time, will become things you can't even conceive of now.

Know yourself. Trust yourself. Love yourself. Be yourself.

And remember, the life you live are the lessons you teach. Be limitless.

With love and learning,
Jim



# 10-DAY KWIK START PLAN

Congratulations on making it to the end of this book. You are one of the few who completes the task at hand. I applaud you.

We've covered a lot in this book. My advice is to implement everything you learned. If you're not sure where to begin, then this 10-day plan is here to help you jump-start your limitless journey.

You can follow this plan I made for you, or you can handpick three top tips you'd like to integrate from each main section: Mindset, Motivation, and Methods. In this way you can focus on the areas where you feel you're currently lacking and need more support. You can also download this 10-Day Kwik Start program in video format from www.LimitlessBook.com/resources.

Thank you for allowing me to be your brain coach through this book. I look forward to hearing about your progress.

## DAY 1: LEARN FASTER

Put this acronym (FASTER) into action on day one:

- **Forget:** The key to laser focus is to remove or forget that which distracts you. There are three things you want to forget (at least temporarily).

    1. What you already know
    2. What's not urgent
    3. Your limitations

- **Act:** Traditional education has trained many people to think that learning is a passive experience. But learning is *not* a spectator sport. The human brain does not learn as much by consumption as it does by creation. Knowing that, I want you to ask yourself how you can become more active in your learning. Take notes. Do the exercises in this book.
- **State:** Your state of being is a current snapshot of your emotions. It is highly influenced by your thoughts (psychology) and the physical condition of your body

(physiology). Change your posture or the depth of your breathing. Consciously choose states of joy, fascination, and curiosity.

- **Teach:** If you want to cut your learning curve dramatically, learn with the intention of teaching the information to someone else.
- **Enter:** If it's not on your calendar, there's a good chance it's not getting done. Take out your calendar and enter blocks of time to invest in yourself, even if that's only 10 or 15 minutes a day.
- **Review:** You are better able to retain information by reviewing multiple spread-out sessions. Get in the habit of reflecting on your day and do a daily review of what you've learned.

For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 4.

## DAY 2: KILL YOUR ANTS

Identify the voices in your head that are focusing on what you can't do—those Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs). Start talking back to them.

Remember, too, to discount those pesky LIEs: Limiting Ideas Entertained. And consistently check in with your BS, Belief Systems. When you find yourself thinking, *I always screw up this sort of thing*, counter with, *Just because I haven't always been good at this in the past doesn't mean that I can't be great at it now. How can I learn this?*

Don't shrink what's possible to fit your mind, expand your mind to fit what's possible. For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 8.

## DAY 3: QUESTION YOUR QUESTIONS

Reflect on the power of dominant questions. You likely have one question you're subconsciously asking yourself throughout the day. Identify this question and think about how you can change it to change your behavior. Knowledge itself is not power, it only has that potential when you apply it. Start asking the questions that will help you get the empowering answers you need throughout the day. For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 4.

## DAY 4: IMAGINE WHAT YOU WANT MOST

Take a moment to write down all the disadvantages you will have when you don't apply what you learned in this book. For example, you could write, "I will have to keep studying hard and settle for the same mediocre results." "I will continue to doubt

myself." "I won't be able to show up at my best for my loved ones" or "I won't get a good job."

Now, write down the advantages you will have when you apply what you learned, such as: "I'll be able to learn what I need to learn with confidence, get a great job I love, and make a lot of money so I can give back to the world." "I will have more free time to exercise and get healthy, travel, and spend more time with my significant other." Or something simple like, "I will finally have some free time to just get caught up and relax!"

Get specific. See it, feel it, believe in it, and then work daily for it. Visualize your celebratory champagne moment. For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 7.

## DAY 5: CONSIDER YOUR PURPOSE

Purpose is about how you relate to other people. Purpose is what you're here to share with the world. What is your why?

Think about who's counting on you to be limitless. Is it your family? Your lover? Your friends? Colleagues? Neighbors? Get specific about who you're letting down by setting limits in your life. Now, think about how you can affect the lives of others when you show up 100 percent. You've found your purpose. For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 7.

## DAY 6: START A NEW HEALTHY HABIT

Take small, simple steps to create one new healthy habit that will lead you to success. Make it a part of your morning routine. You'll never change your life until you *decide* to change something you do daily. Our daily decisions and habits have a huge impact on both our levels of happiness and success. If you're persistent you can achieve it, if you're consistent you can keep it. Little by little, a little can become a lot. Remember, every professional was once a beginner.

Pick one new habit you will start doing today. How can you break it down to small, simple steps that you can do consistently each day? For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 9.

## DAY 7: GIVE YOUR BRAIN SOME ENERGY

Harness your energy to win each day. Eat one or more of these brain foods daily. Which one is your favorite, and why? Remember, what you eat matters, especially for your gray matter. Is what you're eating energizing you or depleting you? Write down some creative recipes you can make using the brain foods below:

Avocados Green leafy vegetables

| | |
|---|---|
| Blueberries | Salmon |
| Broccoli | Turmeric |
| Dark chocolate | Walnuts |
| Eggs | Water |

For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 8.

## DAY 8: OPTIMIZE YOUR STUDY

Studying isn't just for people in school. We're all lifelong learners. Set the optimal state to study and learn. Remove distractions. Use the HEAR (Halt, Empathy, Anticipate, Review) method to watch a TED video you've never seen before and practice your listening skills. For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 12.

## DAY 9: ALWAYS REMEMBER MOM

Before you begin any task, always check with your MOM (motivation, observation, methods). Also, check in with your why. What is your motive for remembering that person's name? What do you observe? Remember, most of your memory is not a retention issue; it's an attention issue. Practice remembering the names of everyone you meet today by using the association technique. If you forget someone's name, write down if it was your motivation, observation, or the method that led you to forget that name. Then try again with another person.

You can practice this skill even when you're shopping at a grocery store or walking through the street or watching television, or anything. Assign names to strangers you see and test how many you can remember. For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 13.

## DAY 10: EMBRACE THE POWER OF READING

Set a daily reading goal, even if it's just for 10 minutes a day. There's power to reading and these benefits compound over time. The key is consistency. Pick a book you've been wanting to read, set a timer for 10 minutes, put away the distractions, and practice reading with a visual pacer. Then schedule your reading time for each day; put it in your calendar as an appointment with yourself.

Leaders are readers. Reading is great exercise for your mind. Remember, you can download decades of experience by reading just one book. For more on this, reread the section in Chapter 14.

# LIMITLESS CHILDREN

## HOW TO APPLY THIS BOOK TO

## PARENTING

*"If a child can't learn the way we teach,*
*maybe we should teach the way they learn."*

—IGNACIO ESTRADA

It's not how smart your children are, it's how are they smart. Traditional education teaches children what to learn, what to focus on, what to think, what to study, and even what to remember. But not how to learn, how to focus, how to think, how to study, and how to remember.

Having grown up with my own learning difficulties, one of my passions is teaching our youth about their mindset, motivation, and methods of learning.

How can you start? I've put some of my favorite strategies in a "kwik" bonus chapter.

*You can download the chapter at:*

**LimitlessBook.com/parenting**

# LIMITLESS TEAMS

## HOW TO APPLY THIS BOOK TO

## BUSINESS

*"An organization's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage."*

—JACK WELCH

Can you apply the Limitless model to your business? Absolutely! For over two decades, we've used these methods to train organizations of all sizes, from entrepreneurial start-ups to corporate clients, including Google, Virgin, Nike, GE, Fox Studios, and Zappos.

Human capital (the collective education, skills, knowledge, training) is an organization's most valuable and most underutilized asset. For your business to grow, your team's collective brainpower must grow.

How can you harness your team's limitless cognitive potential? I wrote a bonus chapter to help you on your way.

*You can download the chapter at:*

**LimitlessBook.com/Business**

# YOUR BONUS RESOURCES

We've assembled the ultimate set of resources that complement this book and will magnify your results.

These include:

- Video tutorials of select lessons (as an example: watch me teach you how to quickly memorize the top brain foods, and demonstrate the remembering names technique in front of a live audience)
- Written exercises and assessments to test your skills
- Brainpower food recipes from meals to teas
- Recommended reading
- Special interviews with top experts delving deeper into the topics covered in this book—sleep, exercise, nutrition, meditation, and others
- And so much more!

*For your free access, go to:*

**LimitlessBook.com/Resources**

# KWIK LEARNING ONLINE

DO YOU WANT TO
DIVE DEEPER INTO THE

# 5 LIMITLESS METHODS?

How do you train yourself, your family, or your team the methods of focus, study, memory improvement, speed reading, and thinking skills?

We've created for you the ultimate proven and simple-to-add-into-your-life online training for anyone looking to uplevel their capabilities.

All you need is 15 minutes a day to build a new learning habit in each area.

Visit KwikLearning.com/Online-Courses and use the code "LIMITLESS" to get 25% off your registration as a thank you for purchasing this book.

When you do, you will join our community of Kwik Brains from 195 countries. Your success is our success, every program comes with an unconditional 30-day money-back guarantee.

# SUGGESTED READING

Our community is passionate about reading. If someone has decades of experience and puts that knowledge into a book, and you can read their book in a few days, you effectively download decades into days.

Leaders are readers. Many of our Kwik Readers commit to finishing #1bookaweek (52 books each year).

As a bonus for purchasing this book, you can join our one-hour speed-reading masterclass as my gift. It will help you tackle your booklist. Get free access at JimKwik.com/Reading

Here is a "kwik" list of some of my favorite mindset, motivation, and methods books. They are listed in no particular order. For the extensive reading list, go to LimitlessBook.com/resources.

*The Magic of Thinking Big* by David J. Schwartz
*Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl
*Understanding Understanding* by Richard Saul Wurman
*The Tapping Solution for Manifesting Your Greatest Self* by Nick Ortner
*Start With Why* by Simon Sinek
*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey
*Change Your Brain, Change Your Life* by Dr. Daniel Amen
*The Motivation Manifesto* by Brendon Burchard
*Tiny Habits* by Dr. BJ Fogg
*Brain Food* by Lisa Mosconi
*Me to We* by Marc Kielburger & Craig Kielburger
*The Promise of a Pencil* by Adam Braun
*Miracle Mindset* by JJ Virgin
*The TB12 Method* by Tom Brady
*Super Human* by Dave Asprey
*The Infinite Game* by Simon Sinek
*The Future Is Faster Than You Think* by Steven Kotler & Peter Diamandis
*The Code of the Extraordinary Mind* by Vishen Lakhiani

*The School of Greatness* by Lewis Howes
*Stress Less, Accomplish More* by Emily Fletcher
*The Power of When* by Dr. Michael Breus
*Becoming Super Woman* by Nicole Lapin
*Chineasy Everyday* by Shaolan
*#AskGaryVee* by Gary Vaynerchuk
*Becoming Supernatural* by Dr. Joe Dispenza
*Moonwalking with Einstein* by Joshua Foer
*The Brain that Changes Itself* by Dr. Norman Doidge
*Mindset* by Carol Dweck
*The Align Method* by Aaron Alexander
*Super Brain* by Deepak Chopra and Rudolph Tanzi
*Genius Foods* by Max Lugavere
*Sleep Smarter* by Shawn Stevenson
*The UltraMind Solution* by Dr. Mark Hyman
*Spark* by Dr. John Ratey
*The 4-Hour Chef* by Tim Ferriss
*Math Doesn't Suck* by Danica Mckellar
*Boundless* by Ben Greenfield
*Six Thinking Hats* by Edward de Bono
*Thrive* by Arianna Huffington
*The Element* by Sir Ken Robinson with Lou Aronica
*TED Talks* by Chris Anderson
*Atomic Habits* by James Clear
*Imagine It Forward* by Beth Comstock & Tahl Raz
*Belong* by Radha Agrawal
*Disrupt-Her* by Miki Agrawal
*The Ripple Effect* by Dr. Greg Wells
*Exponential Transformation* by Salim Ismail, Francisco Palao & Michelle Lapierre
*Think Like a Monk* by Jay Shetty
*The Alter Ego Effect* by Todd Herman
*How to Live a Good Life* by Jonathan Fields
*The Mind Map Book* by Barry Buzan & Tony Buzan
*The Principles* by Ray Dalio
*Re-Create Your Life* by Morty Lefkoe
*Emotional First Aid* by Dr. Guy Winch
*A Higher Branch* by Sam Makhoul
*Cancer-Free with Food* by Liana Werner-Gray
*Food Can Fix It* by Dr. Mehmet Oz

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Kwik (his real name) is a widely recognized world expert in memory improvement, brain optimization, and accelerated learning. After a childhood brain injury left him learning-challenged, Kwik created strategies to dramatically enhance his mental performance. He has since dedicated his life to helping others unleash their true genius and brainpower. For more than two decades, he has served as the brain coach to students, seniors, entrepreneurs, and educators. His work has touched a who's who of Hollywood elite, professional athletes, political leaders, and business magnates, with corporate clients that include Google, Virgin, Nike, Zappos, SpaceX, GE, Twentieth Century Fox, Cleveland Clinic, Wordpress, and such institutions as the United Nations, Caltech, Harvard University, and Singularity University.

Through keynote speeches, he reaches in-person audiences totaling more than 200,000 every year; his online videos have garnered hundreds of millions of views. Kwik is regularly featured in media, including *Forbes*, HuffPost, *Fast Company*, *Inc.*, and CNBC. He is the host of the acclaimed "Kwik Brain" podcast, which is consistently the top educational training show on iTunes. KwikLearning.com's online courses are used by students in 195 countries.

Kwik, an advocate for brain health and global education, is also a philanthropist funding projects ranging from Alzheimer's research to the creation of schools from Guatemala to Kenya, providing health care, clean water, and learning for children in need. His mission: No brain left behind.

*Connect with Jim Kwik at:*

JimKwik.com (speaking, coaching, podcast)
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Twitter: @JimKwik

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Text 310-299-9362

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